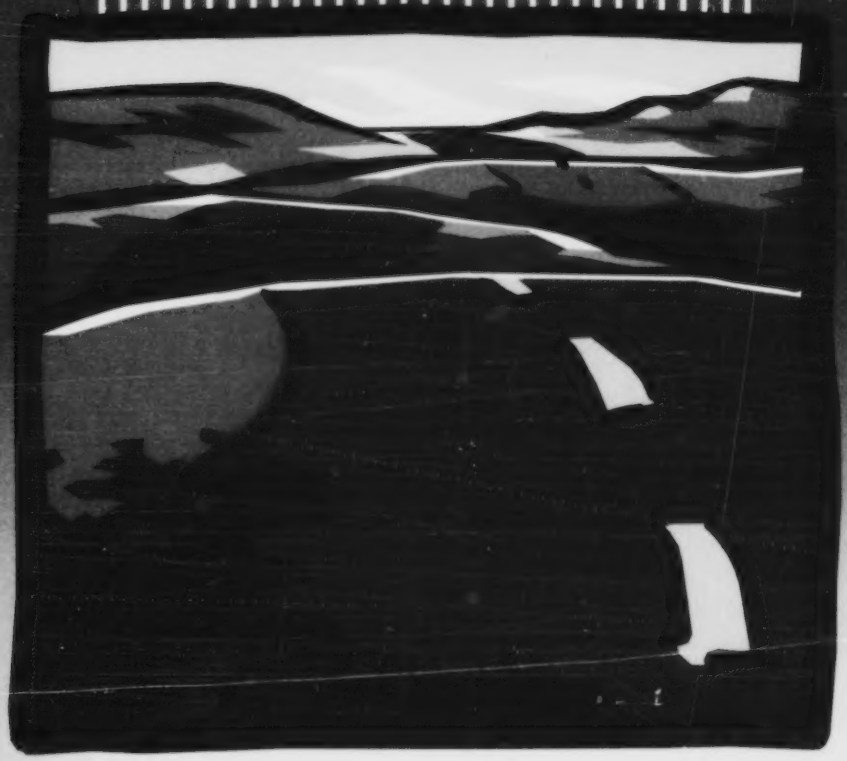

The Journey

A handbook for parents of children who are gifted and talented

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A handbook for parents of children who are gifted and talented

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Sample Web sites are listed in this document. These sites are listed as a service only. Parents and educators using the sites are responsible for evaluating the relevance and accuracy of the information.

This resource is intended for:

Teachers	
Administrators	
Parents	✓
Stakeholders	
Others	

This resource can be downloaded free-of-charge at www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/specialneeds/resource.asp.

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Introduction

The journey for children who are gifted and talented can be exciting and challenging. There are so many twists and turns, detours, and confusing signs that many parents feel they need some sort of road map to guide their children on this journey. Because each child is different, there is no one road map to follow. What this handbook can offer is travelling tips that parents can use to help their children get a good start on their educational road, so they have the best opportunities possible to develop the skills and attitudes they need to live a satisfying and happy life.

This handbook represents a synthesis of current research and effective practices for supporting children who are gifted and talented at home and at school. Because parents know best what makes a difference in their children's happiness and success, Alberta Learning collaborated with the Alberta Associations for Bright Children (AABC) in the development of this resource.

If you are the parent of a school-aged child who has been, or may be, identified as being gifted and having exceptional learning needs, this handbook will offer information and strategies you can use to nurture your child's growth and development. School-aged children who are gifted may have different strengths and needs, and may be very different from one another. The sample strategies in this handbook will not be effective or appropriate for all children who are gifted and talented. As parents, it is up to you to consider what will work best for your child and for your family. For those children who are extraordinarily gifted (less than one in 10,000 children), these strategies may have limited application and parents will need to search out highly individualized solutions for these children. Throughout the resource the term "gifted and talented" will be shortened to "gifted."

This handbook is a compilation of information and sample strategies for parents. Information is aligned with current legislation, Alberta Learning policies and the *Standards for Special Education* (2003). For more detailed information on topics in this handbook, refer to the Web site addresses and document titles listed in the appendices.

This handbook is a companion to *Teaching Students who are Gifted and Talented* (2000), Book 7 in the *Programming for Students with Special Needs* series. It also complements *The Learning Team: A Handbook for Parents of Children with Special Needs* (2003). Both of these resources are published by Alberta Learning and are available for purchase from the Learning Resources Centre or can be downloaded as a free PDF file from the Alberta Learning Web site at www.learning.gov.ab.ca.

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Starting THE Journey

CHILDREN SHARE STORIES ABOUT THE MOST IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN THEIR LIVES—THEIR PARENTS

Sharing their stories

We asked a number of individuals (including some who are now adults and may now be parents of a gifted child) to share examples of how their families nurtured and supported their giftedness. Here are some of the stories they shared.

Ulysses's story

"My parents always encouraged me to experience new things and challenge myself. They also taught me how to question things, and through their guidance, I learned how to become an independent thinker. I think understanding and encouragement are the most important qualities that parents of gifted kids can have."

A shy girl's story

"After kindergarten, my parents put me in the Academic Challenge program for gifted students, despite my teacher's warning that I was too shy. Am I ever grateful that my mom and dad made that choice though! Four years of an extremely challenging school life gave me a head start on skills that I am ever-thankful for."

Cindy's story

"As my sisters and I became teenagers, my father taught us how to make our own decisions. When faced with a decision, my father would point out the consequences of each of the choices, and suggest the choice that he felt was most appropriate. Then he would leave the decision entirely in our hands.

This approach gave me the tools to look at a situation from all angles and make informed choices for myself even if it meant going against my father's wishes from time to time. All children need guidance to learn how to make educated decisions and to understand that taking time to consider all of the possibilities can save you from painful mistakes."

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Megan's story

"As I look back on my childhood I am constantly amazed at how my parents put up with me. Now that I live away from home I can barely put up with my own insatiable curiosity for everything. 'I'm bored Mom,' I used to say, probably twice a day between age 6 and age 12, and quadruple that during the summer. My mother always replied, 'Well what are you going to do about that?' I know now that my parents could not have survived if they'd had to occupy my mind all of the time, but learning to occupy myself helped me throughout my schooling and I am an expert at multitasking because of it.

Neither of my parents ever refused to discuss or explain or demonstrate anything I was curious about. I remember hours spent in the garage with my dad changing tires, or when I was very small watching as he changed the oil by hand. Imagine explaining how an engine worked to a four year old! I am now passionate about cars, and shock my male friends all the time with my collection of knowledge on various models, and the mechanics about them.

When I asked my mother to teach me how to sew when I was eight, we picked a project I could do (a patchwork quilt, which is still a popular item with guests to my apartment today) and she patiently sat with me as I learned to work the machine. I know now that it was a very daunting project for her at the time, but today she admires all of the finely tailored clothes I can make myself when I have the time. I thank my parents every day for the exhausting hours they put in answering all my questions, even the ones they really didn't know how to answer, or didn't want to answer.

I think the most valuable thing my parents ever did for me was backing me up. It may sound strange to say that this had a profound effect on my life, but to have reinforcements when I stood up for myself helped me become a stronger person. Development of self-confidence, particularly in academic pursuits, is difficult as a gifted child, especially since we are often working at different levels than our peers, and often different from our teachers. Over the course of my academic career there have been several times that I have had cause to stand up for myself in a classroom, perhaps over an assignment, a question that the teacher didn't realize could be interpreted in more than one way, or depth that caught a teacher off guard because it was beyond that expected in an assignment or exam. In some cases I was justified, in others perhaps not as much, but having the support of my parents, whenever I needed it, was essential to the growth of my confidence in my abilities. Navigating the world of science at the university level I have run into my share of narrow-mindedness and if I had not been supported as a child, I am fairly confident that I would not have made it to where I am today."

—Megan Smith 3rd year BSc with Specialization in Biochemistry

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Signposts ALONG THE Way

SIGNS OF GIFTEDNESS

Defining giftedness

Trying to define giftedness is like trying to define other complex human characteristics such as intelligence, creativity, love, beauty or justice. How do we measure, develop and evaluate these elusive human traits? Current literature contains a multitude of synonyms for giftedness, including bright, talented, high IQ, advanced, prodigy, precocious, exceptional, superior, creative, rapid learner, brilliant, genius, and so on. The existence of so many descriptive terms, with so many different shades of meaning, demonstrates how elusive and wide-ranging the concept of giftedness really is.

General characteristics

Characteristics associated with giftedness become apparent early in life. Each child who is gifted has an individual profile of abilities, needs, intelligences and learning styles.

As a group, children who are gifted tend to:

- remember with little practice
- work quickly
- see abstract relationships, patterns, alternative views
- generate explanations, theories, ideas and solutions
- show curiosity and/or strong interests.

These children may also tend to:

- reveal unusual or unique responses
- be highly self-directed and independent
- be unusually perceptive of or sensitive to feelings and expectations of others
- seem intense in expression or feelings of justice and/or empathy
- demonstrate perfectionism
- seem out of synch with age-mates or prefer the company of adults.

Some of these general characteristics appear in all children, but are more prevalent in children who are gifted. For instance, many children demonstrate sensitivity and/or perfectionism, but in children who are gifted, these tendencies are more predominant and appear at a more extreme level.

Signs of giftedness

Children who are gifted may be different from other children in a number of ways. As parents, you need to be aware of these differences in order to help recognize and nurture the special gifts and talents your child has. Generally, the characteristics of children who are gifted can be categorized into three broad areas: advanced intellectual ability, abundant creativity, and heightened emotions and sensitivities. Some sample attributes in each of these categories are described below. You may see many of these attributes in your child; however, no child will demonstrate all of the characteristics described.

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Advanced intellectual ability

This category of traits deals with academic skills that are typically emphasized in school, such as abilities in language arts, mathematics and science. It includes a range of skills and ways of thinking that may include the ability to learn and analyze new information quickly, and the use of logic and critical thinking. Children with advanced intellectual ability tend to be curious and constantly ask questions. They seek to understand the "why" of how things work. They may also demonstrate unusual memories, read voraciously and surprise you with their mature thinking.

Abundant creativity

Throughout history, a common characteristic of people who have made outstanding social, scientific and artistic contributions has been their creativity. Recent work by E. Paul Torrance and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has given us new tools and strategies for assessing and teaching creativity.

Children who are creatively gifted often look for the unusual and may take a different path to solving problems and completing assignments or projects at school. They may be more interested in questions and processes than in answers and solutions. Test taking can be a challenge to children who are creative because they tend to see many possibilities. They may be reluctant to identify a single right answer on tests designed with only one acceptable answer in mind.

Heightened emotions and sensitivities

Children who are gifted may feel things more deeply and react to situations more emotionally than other children. Empathic responses, such as offering friendship to certain peers and showing concern about world problems such as poverty and war, are examples of traits in this category.

Another sensitivity a child who is gifted may experience is intuition. This type of exceptional insight into situations and people may be useful in problem solving. These children often have hunches that turn out to be correct. They may demonstrate empathetic understanding well beyond what is expected of children their age.

Checklist of traits

The checklist on the following two pages is adapted from Joan Franklin Smutny's *Stand Up for Your Gifted Child*. The sample traits in the checklist are clustered into the three broad categories: advanced intellectual ability, abundant creativity, and heightened emotions and sensitivities. Use the checklist to identify traits that your child usually or often demonstrates. You can use this information to gain a better understanding of your child's giftedness. It may also provide valuable information to discuss with your child's teachers.

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Checklist of Traits Associated with Giftedness

Use this checklist to better understand your child's giftedness. Check any items that *usually* or *often* apply to your child.

- ❑ 1. Enjoys or prefers to work and play independently.
- ❑ 2. Can concentrate on two or three activities at once.
- ❑ 3. Prefers the company of older children and adults.
- ❑ 4. Reads books and magazines geared for older children and adults.
- ❑ 5. Shows interest in cause-and-effect relationships.
- ❑ 6. Learns quickly and applies knowledge easily.
- ❑ 7. Shows an unusual grasp of logic.
- ❑ 8. Has an advanced vocabulary for his or her age.
- ❑ 9. Enjoys making discoveries on his or her own and solving problems in his or her own way.
- ❑ 10. Likes to play with words.
- ❑ 11. Shows uneven development. (For example: A six year old who understands and can avidly explain the role of chlorophyll in the process of photosynthesis, but struggles with getting dressed every morning and tying his shoes.)
- ❑ 12. Loves math games, playing with number concepts and figuring out how to solve math problems in unique ways.
- ❑ 13. Wants to know the reasons for rules—and the reasons behind the reasons.
- ❑ 14. Discusses or elaborates on ideas in complex, unusual ways.
- ❑ 15. Sees many possible answers to questions or solutions to problems.
- ❑ 16. Is extremely curious, asks lots of questions, and questions the answers.
- ❑ 17. Shows leadership in organizing games and activities, and in resolving disputes.
- ❑ 18. Has a long attention span for things that he or she is interested in.
- ❑ 19. Becomes so involved that he or she is not aware of anything else.
- ❑ 20. Has many unusual hobbies or interests.
- ❑ 21. Has elaborate collections and is passionate about them.
- ❑ 22. Demonstrates a vivid imagination.
- ❑ 23. Invents games, toys and other devices.
- ❑ 24. Thinks of new ways to do things.
- ❑ 25. Likes to create by drawing, painting, writing, building, experimenting, storytelling or inventing.

(continued)

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Checklist of Traits Associated with Giftedness (continued)

- ❑ 26. Enjoys singing, playing an instrument, dancing or moving rhythmically, or pantomime.
- ❑ 27. Responds to music and is able to compose songs or improvise tunes and rhythms.
- ❑ 28. Sees patterns and connections that others don't see, even among things that are apparently unrelated.
- ❑ 29. Argues or debates about logic of ideas, rules or actions.
- ❑ 30. Tends to rebel against what is routine or predictable.
- ❑ 31. Has a well-developed sense of humour.
- ❑ 32. Absorbs the speech patterns and vocabulary of different people, and imitates them in stories, music, skits, comedy routines or games.
- ❑ 33. Is very active and has trouble sitting still.
- ❑ 34. Likes to discuss abstract ideas such as God, love, justice and equality.
- ❑ 35. Expresses unusual sensitivity to what is seen, heard, touched, tasted and smelled.
- ❑ 36. Shows sensitivity to the feelings of others and empathy in response to other people's troubles.
- ❑ 37. Expresses concern about world problems, such as endangered animals, racism, pollution and poverty.
- ❑ 38. Shows a willingness to follow intuitive hunches even if they can't immediately be justified.
- ❑ 39. Demonstrates high energy, focus and intensity.
- ❑ 40. Is frustrated by own imperfection and imperfection in others.
- ❑ 41. Is extra sensitive to criticism.
- ❑ 42. Shows intuitive sensitivity to spiritual values and beliefs and ponders philosophical issues.

Adapted from *Stand Up for Your Gifted Child: How to Make the Most of Kids' Strengths at School and at Home* (pp. 21–23) by Joan Franklin Smutny © 2001. Used with permission from Free Spirit Publishing Inc., Minneapolis, MN; 1-866-703-7322; www.freespirit.com. All rights reserved.

This checklist reflects traits in the three broad categories:

1–10 advanced intellectual ability
11–34 creative traits
35–42 heightened emotional and sensitivity characteristics.

Completing this checklist may give you clues as to where your child shows the greatest strengths. Typically, children who are gifted do not show strengths in all three areas.

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The two sides of giftedness

Giftedness can have two very different sides. At different times in your child's life, one side may be more evident than the other. Knowing what the not-so-positive side can be for your child will help you support him or her through those difficulties. Individual children will not demonstrate all of these sample behaviours, and those behaviours that do occur will not occur all the time or in all contexts.

Children who demonstrate only the not-so-positive side and seldom, if ever, demonstrate the positive characteristics, may have behavioural social difficulties, rather than giftedness.

Advanced intellectual achievement

Positives:

- easily grasps new ideas and concepts, and understands them more deeply than same-aged peers
- comes up with new ideas and concepts on his or her own, and applies them in creative and interesting ways
- easily memorizes facts, lists, dates and names
- enjoys playing challenging games and making elaborate plans

Not-so-positives:

- appears easily bored
- acts like a show-off or know-it-all
- wants to know the reason for everything, which may create problems getting along with others
- is impatient with slowness of others
- is critical or intolerant of views of others
- does inaccurate or sloppy work because his or her hands can not keep up with his or her thoughts

Verbal proficiency

Positives:

- talks early and pronounces words correctly from the start
- develops a large and advanced vocabulary, and uses complex sentence structures
- makes up elaborate stories
- enjoys memorizing and reciting poems and rhymes
- teaches himself or herself to read
- easily and spontaneously describes new experiences and explains ideas in complex and unusual ways

Not-so-positives:

- difficulty talking with and being understood by same-age peers
- uses words to manipulate others
- talks incessantly

Curiosity

Positives:

- asks a lot of questions—one after another
- wants to know about abstract ideas like love, relationships and the universe
- asks tough questions such as "Why are there wars?"
- enjoys trying and doing many new things

Not-so-positives:

- may irritate others with never-ending questions
- moves quickly from one activity and interest to another

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Creativity

Positives:

- uses materials in new and unusual ways
- has lots of ideas to share
- adds new details and twists to stories, songs, movies and games
- responds to questions with a list of possible answers
- creates complicated play and games

Not-so-positives:

- escapes into fantasy
- appears to have trouble separating what's real from what's not
- goes off in own direction rather than following instructions
- spends a lot of time daydreaming or thinking, which may be perceived as wasting time
- makes up elaborate excuses or finds loopholes to evade responsibility for own behaviours

High energy

Positives:

- stays active
- eager to try new things
- can do more than one thing at a time

Not-so-positives:

- needs constant stimulation
- moves around a lot
- appears restless in mind and body
- gets easily frustrated and may act out
- has difficulty paying attention
- has difficulty falling asleep or may appear to hardly ever fall asleep

Intensity

Positives:

- sets goals and works to achieve them
- collects things
- goes further than most children would to pursue an interest, solve a problem, find the answer to a question, or reach a goal
- is very observant
- is very persistent

Not-so-positives:

- seems stubborn
- demonstrates tunnel vision
- seems to ignore family and school responsibilities
- has limited attention span for things that don't interest him or her
- is frustrated when his or her fine motor skills don't match his or her intellectual skills

Logical thinker

Positives:

- enjoys counting, weighing, measuring and categorizing objects
- loves maps, globes, charts, calendars and clocks
- prefers his or her environment to be organized and orderly
- gives logical, reasonable explanations for events and occurrences
- comes up with powerful, persuasive arguments for almost anything
- wants to know reason for rules

Not-so-positives:

- can talk people into almost anything
- can manipulate others
- needs help with social skills
- demands constant explanations for everything
- complains loudly if he or she perceives something as unfair or illogical

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Sensitivity

Positives:

- demonstrates at an early age an understanding and awareness of other people's feelings, thoughts and experiences
- picks up on other people's emotions and is aware of problems that others don't notice
- has strong emotional connections to animals
- asks questions about pain, suffering and violence
- responds emotionally to photographs, art and music
- shares feelings and ideas through one or more of the arts

Not-so-positives:

- takes things personally
- worries about things that are too much for him or her to handle
- can become fearful, anxious, sad, even depressed
- has trouble handling criticism or rejection
- can be upset by other people's strong emotions
- cries or excites easily
- is overselective about food and clothing choices

Sense of humour

Positives:

- makes up riddles and jokes with double meaning
- makes up puns and enjoys all kinds of wordplay

Not-so-positives:

- plays the class clown
- can be disruptive
- gets frustrated when others don't "get it"
- irritates or bothers others with use of puns and pranks
- does not understand or seem to appreciate the humour of other children

Asynchronous development

Asynchronous development can be a characteristic of giftedness. Asynchrony is uneven development in the rates of intellectual, emotional and physical development. This can mean that children who are gifted may be significantly out of developmental step with their same-age peers. Children with asynchronous development:

- may be more complex and intense than same-aged peers
- may feel out of synch with other children their age and within learning and recreational activities designed for their age group
- appear to be different ages in different situations, which could result in internal turmoil and external adjustment difficulties.

These tendencies increase with the child's degree of giftedness, and can make children vulnerable. To quote one researcher: "To have the intelligence of an adult and emotions of a child combined in a child's body is to encounter certain difficulties."

Children who experience asynchronous development will need a sensitive and flexible approach to parenting and teaching in order for them to develop to their full potential. The greatest need of these children is an environment where it is safe to be different.

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Do children who are bright have different needs than children who are gifted?

There is a difference between being bright and being gifted, and it has to do with the degree of a child's ability and talent. Consider the profile illustrated on the following chart.

The child who is bright tends to ...	The child who is gifted tends to ...
• know the answers	• ask the questions
• be interested	• be extremely curious
• pay attention	• get involved physically and mentally
• work hard	• earn high grades and test scores without apparent effort
• answer questions	• question the answers
• enjoy same-age peers	• prefer adults or older children
• learn easily	• already knows the answers
• listen well	• show strong feelings and opinions
• readily take in information	• process information and apply it more broadly, with greater complexity, or in unique ways
• seek clear, fast solution	• explore problems in depth
• like to finish a project	• enjoy the process more than the end product
• be self-satisfied	• be highly critical of self (perfectionist)
• be insightful	• be extraordinarily intuitive

Adapted from Janet Szabos Robbins, "The Gifted and Talented" (Silver Spring, MD: Maryland Council for Gifted and Talented, Inc.).

Children who are bright tend to enjoy and do well in school. These students will often be high achieving and crave challenge, advanced pace and in-depth exploration of the curriculum. Children who are gifted often have exceptional needs beyond what the regular classroom programming offers, and require special accommodations and learning opportunities in order to reach their full potential. These students often face special challenges due to the different way they look at the world, and because their needs are so different educationally from their peers.

Gifted education has the potential to significantly improve learning experiences for many students in regular stream classrooms. Many instructional strategies that have been developed for students who are gifted are now incorporated into regular education programming and are improving the quality of learning opportunities for all children. Samples of these cross-over strategies include project work, self-directed learning, literature-based studies, issue-based inquiries, and providing meaningful choice for students.

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Strategies for nurturing giftedness

- *Feed your child's hungry mind.* Make lots of books and magazines available. Find family-friendly Web sites to surf together. Talk and talk and talk with your child.

- *Be a learner yourself.* Show by example that learning is something that people can and should do every day of their lives, not just when they are in school.

- *When your child asks a question that you can not answer, say so.* By admitting you do not know everything, you are setting a good example. Then try to find the answer together by going to the library, searching the Internet, making phone calls and asking experts on the subject.

- *Encourage and support your child's creativity.* Provide him or her with art materials and other creative playthings, such as Lego, games and costumes. Expose your child to many types of cultural events in your community.

- *Learn more about giftedness, multiple intelligences and emotional intelligences.* See the bibliography on pages 105–108 for titles on giftedness. Check out books by Howard Gardner, Thomas Armstrong or Daniel Goleman to read about different theories of intelligences. Contact the Alberta Associations of Bright Children (AABC) to see if there is a local chapter in your area.

- *When you and your child disagree, take time to hear your child out and consider his or her point-of-view.* Keep an open mind, but stand your ground when you are right, even if your child tries to "out-logic" you.

- *Maintain your sense of humour.* When things get difficult try to see the lighter side.

- *Allow children to leave some projects unfinished.* For some children, the process is more important than the product.

- *Let your child follow his or her passion.* Some children's intensity may lead to immersion in a passion to the exclusion of all else.

- *Don't block your child's learning.* Other people may advise you not to teach your children things they aren't expected to learn until they are older. "Don't push her to read now. She'll have time to do that in Grade 1." But parents of a child who is gifted might be thinking, "Push her? Not likely. She's the one pulling *me* along, and sometimes I can hardly keep up!"

  A teenage boy who did everything he could to learn to read when he was a preschooler offers this advice: "Don't try to stop a kid from learning just to make them normal."

- *Consider your child's need to just be.* Even the advanced reader, or the child who tends to be intensely focused, may also want and need time to play, do nothing, and be silly. It they want to act their age—let them!

Early identification

Research suggests that parents are the best identifiers of young children who are gifted.

Young children who are gifted often exhibit precocious development; they learn quickly, have superior memories and vocabularies, exhibit curiosity, energy and sensitivity. These children may talk, walk and read at much earlier ages than their peers. (Absence of early speech or reading does not mean a child is not gifted. Einstein did not talk until three years of age!) A young child who is gifted is able to acquire a large store of information about the world through advanced mobility, speech and reading. The child has access to an "information bank" different from his or her peers, and this may have a lasting effect on values, attitudes, interests.

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Teachers of young students who exhibit these characteristics are frequently surprised at the depth of understanding, the vocabulary and conversation of these students. It is easy to conclude that parents have coached this precocious development. In fact, typically these children drive the process, asking questions, seeking experiences, and often leading parents to questions where they should "hold the line" on this precocious development. Teachers may not be aware that the child is often the one who is pushing, not the parent.

Research suggests that the more highly gifted the child is, the greater the social pressure to moderate achievements. This is particularly true for young girls who are gifted.

Broadening the understanding of giftedness

There are elements of both mystery and scientific measurement involved in understanding the concept of giftedness. Like the little boy who mused, "Mom, I looked at all the books and watched a TV special and asked my teacher and I still can't figure out where God lives," we do not have all the answers.

Giftedness can only be inferred from observation, testing, and the perceptions and intuitions of others. These indirect measures approximate what we call intelligence or gifted behaviours and characteristics. From all of this, researchers have produced and developed more direct measures—intelligence tests, creativity tests, achievement tests, behavioural checklists and interest inventories—that are our best general indicators of giftedness. These measures and observable behaviours give us a window to a child's potential ability to learn new things and solve problems. However, behavioural science has no thermometer that precisely measures how much intelligence, creativity and giftedness an individual possesses.

Traditionally, giftedness has been equated with high IQ scores. Over the last fifty years, increased interest and research in multiple intelligences, talent development and the connection between emotion and learning has broadened what we know and think about giftedness. We are shifting to a more fluid, multidimensional and process-orientated concept of giftedness.

A core belief that transcends all the multiple definitions is that in order for most children to develop and express their giftedness and talent to its full potential, they will need special intervention and opportunities at home and at school. As parents, you want to ensure that your children have these necessary interventions at home, at school and in the community, as they make their way on their journey through life.

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Forks in the Road

ASSESSMENT AND IDENTIFICATION OF GIFTEDNESS

Purpose of assessment

Children who are gifted have exceptional learning needs at school, in the community and at home. Children who may be gifted are assessed in order to gain a better understanding of their learning and social and emotional needs. Schools require evidence of a child's special needs (either learning difficulties or exceptional learning abilities) in order to provide appropriate programming. Assessment provides such evidence and information to assist in planning for programming.

To assess or not to assess

Parents need to decide a variety of factors in deciding whether or not to have their child assessed for giftedness.

Parents typically choose not to have their children assessed for the following reasons:

- they may feel that identification as gifted or receiving special programming could create social barriers between their child and his or her peers
- they may feel that special programming will be an extra pressure for their already sensitive child
- they may decide that their children are happy in their current classroom situation, and are receiving appropriate academic challenge and intellectual stimulation and are not in need of special programming.

Parents typically decide to have their children assessed for three major reasons:

- to learn more about their children's learning needs
- to help diagnose the cause of emotional or behavioural problems
- as an eligibility requirement for special programming options.

Beginning the process

The assessment process often begins with the classroom teacher. Throughout the course of the school year, teachers have many opportunities to observe and identify individual children who appear to have exceptional learning needs. Parents are then contacted to provide further information and to give consent for formal testing.

In other cases, parents may take the initiative and approach the school to begin the assessment process. They may feel that their children need greater challenge and instructional and content adaptations in their current programming.

Some parents may choose to have their children assessed privately by a psychologist or non-school agency who is familiar with the needs of children who are gifted. There is usually a cost to this service, but that cost may be covered by some insurance and employee assistance plans.

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Giving parental consent

The school will contact you for your permission to begin your child's formal assessment process. To make an informed decision, you need to consider:

- purpose of assessment
- nature of assessment
- intended use of results
- who has access to results.

How are children assessed for giftedness?

Alberta Learning recognizes different types of giftedness, including:

- general intellectual ability
- specific academic aptitude
- creative thinking ability
- social ability
- artistic ability
- musical ability
- kinesthetic ability.

Giftedness can occur in one or more areas. Children who are gifted and talented require differentiated programming to realize their potential.

Alberta Learning requires school districts to implement a planning process that ensures appropriate educational programming for students who are gifted. Jurisdictions use this process to develop a definition that reflects the district's beliefs and values about giftedness. Each school jurisdiction also establishes its own assessment process for identifying giftedness.

A fair and effective assessment process makes a deliberate effort to search for and identify the individual needs of children, based on their strengths, talents and interests. The data gathered should address fundamental questions, such as the following.

- What strengths or talents does this child demonstrate?
- What is happening now in the child's program?
- What adaptations, if any, are necessary or desirable?
- What data gives us a full picture of this child's academic, social and emotional needs?
- What additional data do we need?
- What particular interests and accomplishments tell us about this child's learning needs?
- How does information about the child's ability, interests and motivation guide us in instructional planning?

An assessment for giftedness needs to be a comprehensive package of multiple sources of information that includes some or all of the following:

- achievement testing
- intellectual testing
- creativity assessments
- student attitude and interest surveys
- parent observations
- developmental history
- teacher observations
- marks on classroom assignments, performance tasks, and tests
- work samples
- specialized assessment or performance tasks in talent areas, such as music, dance or sports.

Although IQ tests can provide useful information for making decisions for participation in gifted programming, they are less useful for identifying the most appropriate educational experience for individual children.

To find out more about what specific assessment data can tell you about your child's learning you will need to talk to the person administering the assessment (who will have graduate or post-graduate training in this area). This is especially important because standardized assessments are being constantly updated.

If the school screens all children at a particular grade level, the process will usually begin with a group-administered test. Some jurisdictions rely on teacher nominations to begin the screening process.

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Many jurisdictions have developed behavioural checklists that the classroom teacher and parent complete. [See *Individual Rating Scale for Students Who Are Gifted* on page 16]

For older children, there may also be a self-assessment form that examines and identifies personal interests. [See *Interest Inventory for Elementary/Middle School-aged Students* on page 17]

In addition to performance on paper and pencil standardized achievement tests, information on students' achievement can come from compiling and assessing samples of students' work. The main advantage of using work samples is that the completed products reflect actual mastery of learner outcomes in the province's programs of study. Comparing a student's accomplishments against the curriculum can determine the extent to which the curriculum objectives are being met, and whether or not enrichment of the regular class environment is needed. The assessment of work samples is enhanced when more than one teacher evaluates the samples by using scoring rubrics that outline and describe criteria for different aspects of the work sample.

It is important that, as much as possible, your child has opportunities to be involved in the assessment process so they can better see and understand their own strengths and sustained interests.

It is also important that the assessment process is broad enough to identify not only academic needs, but also, social, emotional and psychological needs.

Parent involvement in assessment

As parents, you can provide valuable information about your child, including a developmental history of your child's motor, language, cognitive and social skills. You can help identify your child's strengths and needs.

Your own documentation can be a great help. For example, when one family's Kindergarten child's teacher suggested an educational assessment for him, the mother realized that she had a ready-made set of observations to compare her son's development against standard development milestones. Like many mothers, she had kept a dated baby book of things her son did and said from babyhood on into the preschool years. These journal entries provided the psychologist who did the assessment with helpful background information. For example, the child was reading signs and using sounding out to spell basic words at an age when children are typically not yet speaking in complete sentences.

Parental knowledge can also be helpful in generating areas for further exploration in the child's Individualized Program Plan (IPP). [See *Parent Identification Form* on pages 18 and 19]

Teachers' contribution to assessment

Classroom teachers can provide valuable insight into a child's learning process. They can document the particular academic skills that a child has mastered. Teachers can make observations to determine the learning conditions in which a child learns best and can also provide insight regarding peer relations in the classroom context.

In some school jurisdictions, teachers are the primary source for identifying students who may be gifted and need special accommodations in their education. It is important that all classroom teachers have a basic understanding of characteristics of students who are gifted.

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Individual Rating Scale for Students Who Are Gifted

Student's Name: _____ Year Level: _____

Date: _____ Age: _____

Check the box that best describes the frequency of the following characteristics and behaviours.

1	Does not demonstrate this trait
2	Demonstrates this trait less than the typical child
3	Compares with the typical child
4	Demonstrates this trait more than the typical child
5	Demonstrates this trait to a high degree

		1	2	3	4	5
1	superior powers of reasoning					
2	intellectual curiosity					
3	learns easily					
4	wide range of interests					
5	broad attention span					
6	superior vocabulary					
7	independent worker					
8	early reader					
9	keen powers of observation					
10	shows initiative and originality					
11	is alert					
12	memorizes quickly and easily					
13	interest in humanity					
14	unusual imagination					
15	ability to follow complex directions					
16	reads rapidly					
17	has several hobbies					
18	reads a wide range of subjects					
19	uses the library frequently and effectively					
20	superior mathematic skills					

Look for patterns of *Has this trait to a high degree.*

Adapted from Alberta Learning, *Teaching Students who are Gifted and Talented* (Edmonton, AB: Alberta Learning, 2000), p. 225.

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Interest Inventory for Elementary/Middle School-aged Students

Student's Name: _____ Year Level: _____

Date: _____ Age: _____

When assigning a topic for a report, suggesting a good book or selecting meaningful examples, it can be helpful to know students' preferences and interests. Use this interest inventory during the first week of school.

1	Outside of school, my favourite activity is
2	My responsibilities at home are
3	The sport I like to watch best is
4	The sport I like to play best is
5	After high school, I plan to
6	The job I want to be doing as an adult is
7	In school, my favourite subject is
8	The subject I do best in is
9	I would like to learn more about
10	In my free time I like to
11	For pleasure, I read
12	I spend about hours or minutes a week reading for fun.
13	The best book I have ever read was
14	The book I am reading now is
15	The kinds of books or stories I like to read are
16	My favourite magazine is
17	My favourite TV show is
18	I use the computer to
19	The part of the world that interests me the most is
20	When I am finished with school, I hope to live in

Adapted from Alberta Learning, *Teaching Students who are Gifted and Talented* (Edmonton, AB: Alberta Learning, 2000), p. GT.238.

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Parent Identification Form

Student's Name: _____ Year Level: _____

Date: _____ Age: _____

Section A

Consider your child in relation to other children of the same age and check the box corresponding to the number that best describes your child for each item.

1	Does not demonstrate this trait
2	Demonstrates this trait less than the typical child
3	Compares with the typical child
4	Demonstrates this trait more than the typical child
5	Demonstrates this trait to a high degree

		1	2	3	4	5
1	Has advanced vocabulary; expresses himself or herself fluently and clearly.					
2	Thinks quickly.					
3	Wants to know how things work.					
4	Is an avid reader.					
5	Puts unrelated ideas together in new and different ways.					
6	Asks for reasons "why"—questions almost everything.					
7	Likes grown-up things and to be with older people.					
8	Has a great deal of curiosity.					
9	Is adventurous.					
10	Has a good sense of humour.					
11	Is impulsive.					
12	Tends to dominate others if given the chance.					
13	Is persistent—sticks to the task.					
14	Has good physical co-ordination and body control.					
15	Is independent and self-sufficient.					
16	Reasons well.					
17	Has a wide range of interests.					
18	Has a broad attention span that allows him or her to persevere in problem solving and pursuing interests.					
19	Shows initiative.					
20	Seeks his or her own answers and solutions to problems.					
21	Has a great interest in the future and/or world problems.					
22	Follows complex directions.					
23	Is prepared to take some social risks.					
24	Is a leader.					
25	Enjoys complicated games.					
26	Sets high goals for himself or herself.					
27	Continually questions the status quo.					

Reprinted from the Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria, Australia from *Bright futures resource book: education of gifted students* (pp. 65–67), by Department of Education, State of Victoria, 1996, Melbourne, Australia: Department of Education, State of Victoria. Adapted from *Education of the gifted and talented* (pp. 77, 86), by G. A. Davis & S. B. Rimm, 1985, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc.

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Parent Identification Form ... continued

Section B

1	Did your child read before he or she went to school?	❑ YES	❑ NO
	If the answer is YES, did your child teach himself or herself to read?	❑ YES	❑ NO
2	Does your child play a musical instrument? If YES, which?	❑ YES	❑ NO
3	In what outside activities does your child participate?		
4	What are your child's special interests or hobbies?		
5	What recent books has he or she read and enjoyed?		
6	Please comment, where appropriate, on any of the following: Your child's ... • unusual accomplishments or special talents • preferred activities when alone • expression of boredom • special problems and needs.		

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Strategies for making assessment a positive experience for your child

- *Be low-key and positive with your child about the assessment experience.* Talk about "helping the teacher to find out how you learn best."

- *Discuss the types of questions your child might be asked.* Discuss the kinds of activities he or she might do, such as writing a story or putting together a puzzle. Explain that some tasks will be easier than others, but information from all of the tasks will help everyone understand how your child learns best so they can plan for the kinds of experiences that will make learning and school more interesting and more meaningful.

- *Get your child off to a good start.* Ensure your child has a good sleep the night before the test and leaves home with a healthy breakfast.

- *Ensure that the timing of the assessment is optimal for getting accurate results and causing minimal stress for your child.* If your child is ill on the day of the assessment, request that the session be rescheduled.

Accessing assessment information

When the assessment is complete, the school will arrange a meeting with parents, the classroom teacher, other school staff and the psychologist conducting the assessments. It is preferable that the same person who conducted the assessment should interpret specific subtest results in the context of the child's background. The goal of this meeting will be to discuss the results of the assessments and what these results mean for your child's learning needs and programming options. All test results should be shared with parents.

You also have access to your child's cumulative record. The cumulative record contains information about your child's attendance, school-awarded marks, results of standardized tests and other information. As a parent, you have the right to request to review the file. If you wish to do this, contact the principal to arrange for a convenient time. When you review the file, the principal or other school staff, such as the counsellor, can discuss test results or other information that is documented. If you feel the file contains outdated or non-essential information, you can request that the school remove this information from the file.

Strategies for accessing and using information from assessments

- *When the assessment report is available, meet with the person who did the assessment and other school staff who are working with your child.* The team will review the written report and answer your questions.

- *Ask for an explanation of any subtest scores on tests.* They indicate areas of relative strength and weakness, and this information can be helpful in planning for programming.

- *Make arrangements to have future questions addressed.* The information from the assessment may take time to digest and you may want to make arrangements for contacting the person who did the assessment if you have additional questions at a later date. Ask for a copy of the report to review at home.

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Strategies for talking with your child about giftedness

- *Consider how the assessment meeting might be an opportunity for your child to learn about their giftedness.* Participating in part of this discussion could help your child better understand his or her strengths and learning needs.

- *Acknowledge that your child may learn differently than his or her peers.* Most children who are gifted already feel this, and because no one talks about it, they may decide that different means something negative. Talking openly and honestly about your child's different ways of thinking and advanced abilities may bring relief.

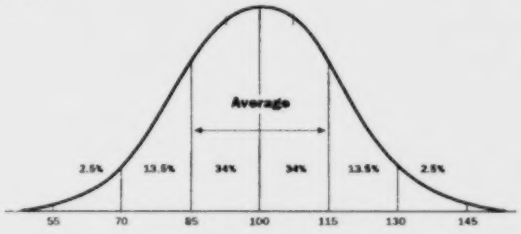
- *Help your child find the words to explain his or her feelings of differentness.* Even a young child may need to know, "I learn things differently than some of my friends do. Sometimes I don't need as much time or practice to learn something new."

- *Create a context for understanding.* Discuss giftedness within the context of other differences that children have, such as eye colour, how fast you can run or what kind of books you like to read.

- *Consider how much specific assessment information to share.* Many school psychologists believe that a child needs to know the results of testing, including individual intelligence and achievement measures. How much specific information you choose to share with your child depends on his or her maturity level.

- *Consider using a visual.* Some parents find the normal curve can be a useful visual aid for explaining the overall IQ score on a standardized test to older children.

IQ scores and percentage of students at each level



- *Be sure that your child understands that these assessment measures identify potential only.* Discuss how commitment, motivation and effort will result in accomplishment and achievement of potential, and that these qualities cannot be measured.

- *Have a family discussion.* If siblings are curious about the assessment process, discuss how each person learns differently and how this assessment will help identify how their brother or sister learns best.

Which children tend to get missed in the identification for special programming for gifted education?

Certain populations of children tend to be under-identified in special programs for the gifted. They include the following groups of children.

- *Children from cultural and ethnic minorities* Children who have English as a second language may have high verbal ability, but in their native language. They may not be identified as gifted learners until they have learned enough English to cope with school programs and demonstrate their academic potential. Standardized tests are often biased towards majority (white middle- to upper-socioeconomic class) students. Also, children from cultural and ethnic minorities may have gifts and talents that are not understood or valued by mainstream society.

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- *Children who have specific learning disabilities or academic difficulties in certain areas*
  A specific learning difficulty may mask giftedness. Not all children who are gifted excel in all areas of the school curriculum. Some may have an inordinate strength in particular subject areas, such as mathematics or science, and may in fact have some learning difficulties in other subjects, such as reading or writing. The academic difficulty may need special instructional accommodations, as do the areas of strength.

- *Children who appear to be underachieving*
  An underachiever is one who has the potential for greater accomplishment than is actually demonstrated at school. Often these students are perceived as unmotivated and are sometimes only identified as gifted when referred for assessment for other reasons.

- *Girls*
  Girls are often under-represented in programs for the gifted. Twice as many boys as girls are identified at the elementary level. Differing societal expectations toward girls is one possible reason. Some girls may learn to cover up or deny their abilities in order to be popular or feel "normal." Or, if they are identified as gifted, they may choose not to participate in the gifted program due to social pressures.

- *Children who are perceived as having behaviour problems*
  Children who are gifted and exhibit irritating behaviours are often overlooked as candidates for special program options. The problem behaviours may mask the gifted potential of these students.

- *Children who are poor test takers*
  Some children who are gifted have difficulty with traditional types of tests and, as a result, score poorly and are not identified as gifted. This underscores the need for multiple criteria to identify gifted potential, such as parent and teacher nominations and work samples.

What to do if you have concerns about the assessment of your child

If the school is reluctant to initiate testing, or school staff do not recognize giftedness in your child, request information from the principal on the school jurisdiction's policy for gifted education. Review the criteria and, if you still feel your child demonstrates signs of giftedness and has exceptional learning needs, discuss your concerns with the school principal or staff in the jurisdiction office. Bring evidence of your child's giftedness, such as behaviour checklists or work samples, to share at the meeting.

Using assessment results for long-range planning

Parents can use the information from assessments to communicate with teachers, participate in IPP conferences, build on their child's strengths and needs at home, and help their child plan for the future.

Assessment results give school jurisdictions valuable information that they can use to develop programming options and to create professional development opportunities for teachers and other staff. Knowing the number of students who are gifted, as well as the ages of these children and the types of giftedness they demonstrate, can help jurisdictions with comprehensive long-range planning.

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Journey THROUGH School

MAKING THE MOST OF THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

Students with special needs

Under Alberta's *School Act*, children who are gifted and talented are considered students with special needs because they require special programming and accommodations to meet their exceptional learning needs. Funding for students who are gifted and talented is included in the per student grant that is intended for all students. It is the responsibility of each local school jurisdiction to identify and determine the special needs of students and then provide appropriate educational programming to meet those needs.

Parent roles

It is important that parents be involved and informed partners in their child's education. Being an *involved* member of your child's learning team means:

- participating in decisions that affect your child's education
- giving your written and informed consent for any specialized assessments
- knowing your child's teachers and keeping them informed about important information that could affect your child's learning
- working with school staff to develop and implement appropriate programming for your child
- receiving information on your child's learning and progress from teachers
- discussing decisions that you do not think will best serve your child's learning needs.

Being an *informed* member of your child's learning team means knowing:

- your district and school's philosophy and beliefs about programming for children who are gifted
- what enrichment and programming options are available for children who are gifted, both in the school and in the community at large
- how children are identified and selected for gifted education
- everything that you can about both your child's gifts and talents, and his or her specific learning needs.

Sources of information

Your child's teacher can be a good starting point for learning more about gifted education. Information sessions offered by school districts, as well as one-on-one meetings with classroom teachers or resource personnel, can also provide a wealth of information about gifted education and available programming options.

Other parents with children who are gifted can often provide information about strategies that have worked for their children. Professionals can sometimes link up parents with common concerns. Through various organizations, there are also parents who can informally mentor others facing similar challenges. Although not all strategies will work for all students, knowing what has worked for others may be helpful as you consider options and make decisions about your own child's education.

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Questions to ask

Parents need information to assist them in making decisions about their children's programming. Here are some sample questions that might be helpful for finding out more about your child's current or potential school placement and programming.

- What is the school's mission or focus statement and accompanying goals, and how do staff and administrators reflect these goals in their daily practice?
- How do the school's goals and mission statement highlight the importance of academic disciplines—mathematics, language arts, history, science and second languages?
- How do the school's goals and mission statement highlight the importance of character, citizenship and academic achievement?
- Are there opportunities for students to advance at their own pace through the academic programs?
- How does the school honour its high achieving students?
- How does the school honour students who contribute to the betterment of the school community?
- If a high school, does the school provide Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses?
- Are there readily available textbooks that are sufficiently demanding for students with high ability?
- How does the school provide opportunities for enrichment?
- What courses are available in the arts?
- Does the school facilitate opportunities for students to take courses from other educational institutions such as local colleges or universities?
- If a child has a learning disability, what resources and services are available for assessment, diagnosis and programming?
- How does the school program encourage individual accountability?
- How does the school create and maintain a safe and caring environment that supports learning?
- How does the school provide in-service training and education to its staff? What is the professional development focus for the upcoming school year?
- How are expectations in each subject area communicated to students?
- How does the school encourage the active involvement of parents in supporting their children's academic achievement?
- In what ways are parents involved in the school?
- How does the school or district provide opportunities for parents to learn more about gifted education?
- How is the school using technology to help students learn?

Planning for programming

Students who are gifted require **differentiated instruction** to improve their opportunities to learn. Differentiated instruction includes the thoughtful manipulation of four key learning elements, including content, process, product and environment. These four elements are interrelated and affect one another.

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Content—what children are learning

All students in Alberta follow a standard curriculum. To become familiar with what your child is learning in school, see the *Curriculum Handbooks for Parents* available for each grade level. They can be purchased from the Learning Resources Centre or downloaded at no charge from the Alberta Learning Web site at www.learning.gov.ab.ca/parents/handbooks/.

Children who demonstrate that they already know some content, or can learn required content in much less time than their classmates, will benefit from content differentiation. There are a number of ways content can be differentiated. For example, children can use more advanced texts and resource materials that go beyond the specific learner outcomes in the curriculum and introduce new concepts or explore the topic in more depth and breadth.

Process—how children are learning

The *process* is how children make sense of concepts, generalizations and learner outcomes. It is how the teacher adapts the instructional strategy and what type of learning strategies the children use. Differentiated process focuses on such things as higher order thinking skills, open-ended and problem-solving tasks and learning at more complex levels. Process can be differentiated in a variety of ways, including creating opportunities for meaningful research. Curriculum compacting, questioning techniques, independent projects, and acceleration are all effective strategies for differentiating process.

- *Curriculum compacting*: This strategy either eliminates learning activities for skills and information that has been previously mastered or streamlines work to match the student's ability. The advantage of this strategy is that students can use the class time freed up by compacting to pursue enrichment activities that align with their individual learning needs and interests.

- *Questioning techniques*: Questions that draw on advanced levels of information require leaps of understanding and challenge students' thinking. Open-ended questions invite critical and creative thinking, and nurture the development of students' capacities to frame their own questions.

- *Independent projects*: Independent projects let students identify issues or topics of interest, plan an investigation and synthesize the findings. Projects offer enrichment and meaningful study for students who can demonstrate mastery with required work.

- *Acceleration*: Acceleration means permitting students to master content material at a faster pace. This can be achieved in a variety of ways such as identifying appropriate starting points based on pretesting, streamlining the regular curriculum to eliminate repetition of previously learned materials, and taking advanced subject matter courses.

Product—what children are doing

The *products* of learning are the ways in which students explore and demonstrate their understanding of content and process. Students who are gifted often need to produce what Dr. Joseph Renzulli calls "real-life products" for real audiences. These go beyond the typical research paper or report to alternatives that develop individual students' talents and curiosities and can be shared and used by others.

For example, conventional writing assignments may not be the best way for some students to show their learning. Often their brains think quicker than their hands can write. An action product, such as a PowerPoint slide show or a performance, can be a better learning experience.

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Environment--where children are learning

The *environment* refers to the actual physical and social setting where learning takes place, as well as the conditions under which a child is working. The learning environment can be differentiated by changing the actual place where students work, altering the teacher's expectations, allowing flexible time limits, providing opportunities for in-depth research and giving students opportunities to work with mentors.

For some students, this enrichment can be provided in a regular classroom. To do this effectively, teachers need to offer content that is broader in concept, deeper in understanding and relevant to the student's needs and abilities. Independent study projects are often used because they can allow students to explore content areas in more depth. Enrichment replaces or extends the regular curriculum with activities that foster higher level thinking skills and problem solving. Enrichment may mean taking field trips, doing special projects or working with mentors or professionals in areas of interest.

Some children who are gifted receive individualized programming in the regular classroom in such a way that it addresses their learning needs without drawing undue attention to differences. Many instructional strategies and learning activities used with students who are gifted are effective to use with all students. For example, activities such as debates, which involve students in creative and challenging learning, may be connected directly to curriculum outcomes in a variety of subjects.

Other learning settings could include the following. All settings may not be available in all districts. Some children will benefit from programming that uses a combination of one or more of these approaches.

- *Cluster grouping*: small groups of students receive advanced instruction in reading, mathematics and other content, or work on alternate assignments.
- *Pull-out classes*: separate classes focused on special areas of emphasis for students with similar interests or abilities.
- *Out-of-grade placement*: students are placed with a higher grade for certain subjects such as language arts, mathematics and/or science.
- *Online or distance education courses*: students can access electronic classrooms via the computer, using e-mail, conferencing and direct linkage with teachers.
- *Seminars and special projects*: projects may include interdisciplinary studies and special interest groups.
- *Mentorships/Apprenticeships*: students work with a resource teacher, media specialist, parent volunteer or community member to work on a project, develop skills in a specific field and build career awareness.
- *International Baccalaureate (IB)*: provides academic programs that are internationally developed and recognized for academic rigour.
- *Advanced Placement courses (AP)*: senior high school courses that follow the prescribed AP program and allow students to earn college/university credit through testing.
- *Full-time classes or schooling-within-schools*: students receive instruction full-time in special classes for students who are gifted, housed in local schools or district sites.
- *Schools for the gifted*: serving students from several local schools, or a charter or private school dedicated to the gifted.
- *College courses/dual enrollment*: students take higher-level courses at a college or university while attending high school.
- *Home schooling*: parents serve as teachers and children learn at home.

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Individualized Program Planning

Each student identified as having special needs must have an individualized program plan (IPP). This includes students who are identified as gifted and talented according to Alberta Learning criteria. Identified gifted and talented students receive a special education code for districts to use when reporting to Alberta Learning.

Generally, students registered in alternative arts or athletics programs, or academic programs, such as the International Baccalaureate Program, are not coded as gifted and talented unless they meet Alberta Learning's and the school district's specific criteria. If a child does not receive a special education code, it is not mandatory to develop an IPP for that child. However, some school districts may choose to develop an IPP for a student who does not receive a code, if programming for that student is significantly different from other students in the classroom.

An IPP is a written commitment of intent by the learning team to ensure appropriate planning for students with special needs. An IPP is:

- a collaborative team effort involving the student, parents, teachers and resource personnel—the individuals involved may change over time, depending on the needs of the student
- developed to address the specific educational needs of individual learners
- a planning document that helps monitor and evaluate a student's education programming and progress
- a process and document that evolves over time.

Programming for students with special needs builds on the provincial curriculum—the knowledge, skills and attitudes that a student is expected to learn in a subject area. However, the content may need to be modified or the learning activities and instruction adjusted to meet an individual student's ability level and exceptional learning needs.

Developing an IPP involves six interrelated stages:

1. Identifying needs
2. Setting the direction
3. Creating a plan
4. Implementing the IPP
5. Reviewing and revising
6. Transition planning.

These steps may occur in different sequences or be worked on simultaneously depending on the individual needs of students. As parents and members of the learning team, you can be actively involved in all stages of the IPP process.

Step 1: Identifying needs

You are a source of valuable information in the initial stages of developing and setting the direction of the IPP.

You can provide information about your child in areas such as the following:

- personality traits
- strengths and needs
- family and educational history that impacts the child's present learning situation
- interests, talents and desires
- aspirations and goals for your child
- assistance that your family can provide at home to reinforce and extend skills and concepts
- information about community involvement, such as music lessons, that could support and enrich your child's learning.

Alberta Learning requires that the following essential information be included in the IPP:

- assessment data
- current level of performance and achievement
- identification of strengths and areas of need
- measurable goals and objectives
- procedures for evaluating student progress
- identification of coordinated support services required, including health-related services
- relevant medical information
- required classroom accommodations, such as changes to instructional strategies, assessment procedures, materials, resources, facilities or equipment

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- transition plans
- formal review of progress at regularly scheduled reporting periods
- year-end summary.

Step 2: Setting the direction
Establishing priorities helps the learning team focus on what is critical for your child to learn this school year. The team establishes these priorities based on all the information that has been gathered to date and the availability of resources.

To determine the most important learning goals, the team considers:

- priority areas to focus on
- possibilities for using this new skill or knowledge in other areas and settings
- related areas of strength
- how this need affects overall learning and achievement
- transferability to other subject areas
- how the skills and knowledge relate to your child's future career goals.

Step 3: Creating a plan
As part of the IPP team, you can offer ideas and information in the creation of long-term goals for your child. These goals are usually what the child might accomplish in a specific area in a determined period of time, usually one school year. It is important that the team identify what is manageable for the child. This is where a parent's perspective can be especially helpful.

Long-term goals are broad statements about achievement, such as:

- complete Grade 8 math program with at least a 90 percent average by end of the first term
- engage in five formal debate activities to hone logical thinking skills, including
  - comparing
  - finding assumptions
  - interpreting evidence
- design and present a science fair project to extend and reinforce creative and critical thinking skills.

Short-term objectives are small measurable steps that will lead from the child's present performance to the long-term goal. For example, short-term objectives for the last long-term goal above could include:

- science fair project
  - proposal mutually agreed upon by student and teacher by October 1
  - develop a scoring guide to assess project by October 15
  - project ready for fair by November 30
  - project plan and final product meet "Awesome" level of scoring guide.

Understanding the long-term goals and short-term objectives of your child's program plan will help you decide how to best support your child at home.

Step 4: Implementing the IPP
In this phase of the process, the learning team reviews the content of the IPP and how progress will be measured. Teachers then put the instructional and assessment strategies into practice, and adjust short-term objectives as needed. Look for ways your family can support the IPP goals at home.

Step 5: Reviewing and revising
Review meetings are opportunities to discuss your child's program and consider possible revisions. The year-end review is especially important as the team reviews the education plan and adds written recommendations to the IPP. This is particularly true for children moving from one school to another or making any kind of transition.

You can also contact the school to request a review of the IPP at any time if you have concerns about your child's progress or if your child is experiencing significant changes in achievement, attitude or behaviour. The IPP can be adjusted or changed at any time throughout the school year, as the team deems necessary.

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Strategies for effective IPP meetings

Before the meeting

- Discuss the positive elements in the IPP with your child.
- Find out about your child's involvement and role in the meeting. Decide if your child will benefit from participating in part or all of the meeting.
- Review the comments from your child's last report card, and goals and objectives from the last IPP. What progress have you seen? Note any areas of concern.
- Ask your child questions such as the following.
  - What do you like best about school?
  - What are some changes that would help you learn better at school?
  - What goals do you have for yourself?

  (If your child attends the meeting, he or she may be able to give this input directly.)
- If appropriate, gather samples of work your child has done at home.
- Be prepared. Write a list of questions and concerns that you want to discuss. Prioritize your concerns.

At the meeting

- Ask questions to ensure that you have a clear and accurate understanding of your child's progress and program.
- Ask if there are any new assessments, reports or observations.
- Ask about your child's strengths, interests, areas of growth, areas of need and friendships.
- Share your present and future goals for your child.
- Discuss any specific concerns you have about your child.
- Discuss whether or not the IPP needs to address specific social or emotional needs of your child.
- Share any home conditions that may impact on your child's performance or behaviour at school, and any recent documents or medical updates.
- Share samples of your child's work completed at home, if you think this can contribute to a better understanding of your child. Teachers usually have samples of student work to share, but if not, ask to see samples.

At the close of the meeting

- Establish mutually agreed upon goals and strategies for your child.
- Find out how you can support your child at home.
- Take notes on recommendations and timelines, such as additional programming or assessments.
- Verbally summarize your understanding and interpretation of the decisions made, actions to be taken, timelines, and roles and responsibilities of each participant.
- Give feedback to the people working with your child in areas where you noted positive effort, growth or change. People who feel valued and recognized are encouraged to continue their efforts.
- Sign the IPP to indicate your agreement with the plan. Should you disagree with the IPP and not wish to sign it, the school will document the reasons for your decision you have given and what actions are taken to resolve the issue. *For additional information on resolving differences, see page 32.*
- Ask for a copy of the IPP to refer to at home.
- Decide on the next meeting date.

After the meeting

- Give your child feedback from the meeting.
- Discuss what needs to happen in order to reach the IPP goals. Discuss what your child's role is and also how the teachers and your family will support the plan.

To review the effectiveness of your child's IPP, consider the following questions.

- Does the IPP focus on the individual needs of my child?

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- How does the IPP build on my child's strengths?
- Does the IPP focus on key goals for my child?
- Does the IPP use more than one source of assessment data to determine strengths and needs?
- If there are several teachers responsible for my child's education program, are there procedures for all of them to have access to the IPP so they can use it to plan instruction, monitor progress, and contribute to evaluating and changing goals and objectives?
- Does the IPP use a number of strategies to measure and communicate my child's progress?
- Is progress on IPP goals monitored frequently? If objectives are met, are new ones set? If my child is not demonstrating progress, does the team review the program and make changes?

Step 6: Transition planning
Transition planning involves identifying the kinds of skills that need to be in place for students to be successful in future placements and settings, and developing a plan of action to ensure students acquire these skills and attitudes. It may also include specific plans for moving between education placements and programs.

Building partnerships with school staff

One of the keys to supporting your child's journey through school is establishing positive working relationships with your child's teachers and other school staff. There are a number of ways you can help to achieve this goal.

The first step in establishing effective home–school partnerships is to get to know staff early in the school year and ensure there is ongoing communication. Make an appointment with the teacher to drop by the classroom before or after school to introduce yourself. You can also do this by telephone or e-mail. If you want to talk with the teacher, call the school and find out the best time to do this. Welcome parent–teacher conferences as important opportunities to exchange information and work together. When children observe parents and teachers working collaboratively and treating each other with respect, it sends a powerful message about the value of partnerships and cooperation.

Part of working as a team means keeping teachers informed about important information that could affect your child's learning. Sharing relevant information can have a positive effect on your child's learning experience because it allows teachers to tailor learning opportunities and deal knowledgeably with sensitive issues.

Information to share might include:
- successful learning and behaviour techniques that you are using at home
- changes in the home setting—such as a death, divorce, unemployment or loss of a pet—that might cause emotional reactions
- your child's past school experiences
- ongoing goals for your child that you are supporting at home.

Under the *Standards for Special Education*, the principal is responsible for special education programming in the school. Get to know your school principal. He or she can be a source of information and is an important member of your child's learning team.

Be part of the school community

There are many ways you can participate in your child's school community, ranging from providing input to serving on school councils to volunteering in the school. You need to decide on the degree and nature of involvement after considering your skills, interests, family needs, work commitments and other obligations.

It is important to provide your input at available opportunities. Teachers seek parental opinions, comments, feedback and suggestions in many ways. Some ways you can provide input include:
- writing comments and completing feedback sheets attached to school newsletters

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- completing interest and academic inventories about your child
- commenting on projects and accomplishments.

Participating in parent–teacher conferences and attending school council meetings are also opportunities to provide input to the school community.

Participating in school councils or serving on school committees can be opportunities to gain knowledge about educational issues, build relationships with other parents and school staff, and work together to ensure that all children in the school are getting a quality education. School councils provide advice to the principal on school-related issues, such as policies, program priorities, budget, special needs, school climate and events planning.

Volunteering

For some parents, volunteering in their children's school can be a hands-on way to show their children that they value education and support the work of teachers and other staff. This, in turn, can increase all children's learning opportunities. Parent volunteers can also be powerful supporters of the school and public education, and provide valuable links to the wider community.

Volunteers can offer to:

- share expertise on a particular career, theme, skill, interest or custom
- work one-on-one with a child who is experiencing academic difficulties in a specific area such as reading
- serve as a mentor to an individual child
- complete administrative tasks at home, such as preparing materials or phoning other parents about field trips and special events
- assist in the school library
- assist in the classroom under the direction of the teacher.

Strategies for building effective partnerships with school staff

- *Know what you want to accomplish and keep your goals in mind, but remember that there are many routes to your destination.* Be prepared to be flexible and to make compromises along the way.

- *Work cooperatively.* Listen to and consider the perspectives of others. Most of the people you negotiate with have good intentions, even if their opinions may differ from yours. Concentrate on concerns, not emotions. Find areas where you agree and build on those.

- *Expect courtesy and respect from school staff.* Meaningful parent involvement is a core value of the education system in this province.

- *Be respectful of those who are working on behalf of your child.* Go out of your way to be polite and diplomatic and always keep your child's needs in the forefront of the discussion.

- *Be patient and persistent.* Change may happen slowly; finding the information or assistance you require may be a time-consuming process of trial and error. Keep moving toward your goals step-by-step.

- *Be a good communicator.* The old adage "it's not what you say but how you say it" is so true when working with others. Clear and regular communication among all members is key to the success of the learning team.

- *Ask for clarification if there is anything you are unsure of.* You may hear terms you are not familiar with, such as *IPPs* (individualized program plans) or *outcomes*. If at any time you are unsure about specific information, ask. To communicate effectively, everyone on the team must speak and understand the same language.

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- *Enlist the support of like-minded parents, teachers, administrators and community members.* The best advocates work with others. By working in collaboration with teachers and other parents, seeking family support and accessing assistance through community agencies, you can create win-win solutions that work for everyone.

- *Recognize and cherish your accomplishments.* Celebrate the positive impact they have on your child's learning, and emotional and social life.

- *Understand that communication and collaboration take time.* You may be invited to participate in a variety of meetings over the course of the school year. These may include in-school team meetings as well as consultations with other support personnel, in addition to regular parent–teacher conferences.

- *Give change a chance.* Change takes time. Your child may require a period of adjustment to a new setting before positive change is evident. Clear, open communication among learning team members will go a long way to ensuring expectations are reasonable.

How do I know if my child's programming is the right programming?

Talking to children about experiences at school and observing their behaviour toward school are keys to ensuring that they are on the right track. If your child is excited about learning, talks openly about his or her classes, and is eager to go to school, he or she is most likely being appropriately challenged and supported.

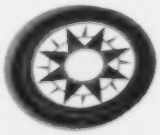
If you feel your child may not be receiving the right programming, or you have any other concerns, talk to your child's teacher. Always try to resolve issues with the people who are working with your child. This means meeting with the learning team and looking for win-win solutions.

For example, if your child is frustrated by the lack of challenge in the current learning situations, meet with his or her teachers to review the current program and discuss potential changes that could be made. If your child has mastered the skills in a particular subject and finds the work boring or repetitive, a pretest of the unit could help to determine his or her level of skill; if your child does demonstrate mastery of the learning outcomes currently under study, the teacher might consider different options such as accelerating learning or arranging for your child to use the time to do an independent study project.

If you cannot resolve the issue with your child's teacher, the next step is to request a meeting with the school principal. Let the principal know your concerns. Also let the principal know that you have discussed this issue with the teacher and have not been able to come to a satisfactory agreement. The teacher should participate in the meeting with the principal. This will ensure all partners can contribute information, perspectives and possible solutions.

Resolving differences

School boards are required to make every reasonable effort at the school and district level to resolve concerns collaboratively with parents. Despite these efforts, there may be differences of opinion between parents (or in some cases, an older student) and the school about the education of a child with special needs. When this happens, there are a number of strategies for successfully resolving these differences.



Strategies for resolving differences

- *Begin by requesting a meeting with your child's teachers.* Indicate what the topic will be. This information allows teachers to schedule an appropriate amount of time, and be better prepared to answer your questions and address particular concerns.

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- *Be prepared.* Write down questions and concerns you want to address and bring this list to the meeting.
- *Focus your concerns on your child's learning needs.* Decide what is most important and focus your energy on that.
- *Consider what you would like the outcome of the meeting to be.* This will help you focus your discussion and problem solving.
- *If possible, involve your child in finding a solution.*
- *Ask questions.* Ensure you have a clear understanding of your child's progress and programming by asking as many questions as you need to.
- *Take notes, especially with respect to recommendations and timelines.* Confirm those commitments at the end of the meeting.
- *If you feel that additional information is necessary, schedule another conference at the conclusion of your meeting.*
- *If you come to an agreement that a certain change will be made, establish how you will know if this change is happening and that it is working.* Discuss the outcomes that have been agreed upon and decide when progress on these outcomes will be reviewed.
- *Give teachers and the school time to implement changes.*

District level appeals

If the issue cannot be resolved at the school level, the Alberta *School Act*, Section 123, states that school boards must have a process for appealing school district decisions that significantly affect a child's education, such as disagreements over identification of a special need or program placement. The school principal can provide information on the appeal procedure in your district. Typically, parents and school staff prefer to work out agreements collaboratively at the school level, but in some instances the next step is an appeal at the district level.

Appeal procedures vary from district to district but all procedures should be built on the following principles.

- The appeal process should be fair, timely and open. It should ensure that parents and district staff know in advance how the appeal process works, and have reasonable opportunity to prepare and present their case.
- The process should have the flexibility to accommodate different kinds of disputes.
- Parents, or students who are 16 or older, should have the right to appeal at least one level above the level of the employee who made the decision being appealed. Whoever hears the appeal should be the person who will make the appeal decision. For example, if a principal made the original decision that is under appeal, a person in a supervisory position over the principal should hear the appeal and uphold or overturn the original decision made by the principal.
- The person who hears the appeal should not have been involved in the decision being appealed.

School boards have an obligation to inform parents of their right to appeal and must provide written copies of the district's process. The district policy should be consistent with the principles above, and should describe specifically how the process works and how long it takes. If the board itself does not hear the appeal, the policy should clearly state who will assume this responsibility.

Review by Minister

If an appeal to the school board is completed and parents disagree with the decision and feel it does not meet the learning needs of their child, they may write to the Minister of Learning and ask for a review of the board decision. School boards have an obligation to advise parents of their right

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to request that the Minister review the board's decision if they are not satisfied with that decision. A student who is 16 years of age or older may also request a review. The Minister of Learning may review a board decision on some specific matters, including the special education placement for a student with special needs.

If the Minister does review the case, the review will only assess the situation for one school year, because that situation may change over time. For example, the board may not offer a program in the year of the review, but may develop an appropriate program later. A student's learning needs may also change so that the program determined to be appropriate at the review may no longer match the student's learning needs.

There are very few reviews by the Minister each year. In most cases, parents and educators prefer to resolve differences at the school and district level.

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The Family Journey

HOW GIFTEDNESS CAN AFFECT FAMILY EXPERIENCES

The parent experience

Giftedness is part nature—inherited from parents—and part nurture—fostered by day-to-day interactions with family and other people. You cannot change nature, but you can enhance nurturing.

Raising a child who is gifted can bring extra challenges to parenting. For example, families may need extra time and resources to nurture a child's exceptional needs or parents may have difficulty relating to some of the struggles their children who are gifted face. These factors can potentially add strain that would not be present if there were no children with exceptional needs in the family.

Strategies for a positive parenting experience

- Set realistic goals for both you and your child.
- Encourage more self-directed activities to foster independence and free up time for you as parents.
- Keep your sense of humour.
- Start a new activity or resume one you used to enjoy.
- Maintain your friendships with other adults.
- Learn all you can about giftedness and consider whether you might also be gifted.
- Talk to other parents of children who are gifted to find out about successful strategies and experiences they can share.
- Ask for help when you need it.
- Join a parent support group.

Talk with your family about giftedness

When one sibling is identified as gifted and another is not, the whole family may be affected. It may be difficult for the other child to understand the difference, and resentment or rivalry can sometimes result. Families will need to look for ways to maintain an equal and balanced family environment that supports all family members.

Discuss with your children how labels are for identifying programming requirements in school, not for identifying people. If your child has a dual exceptionality of giftedness and a learning disability then this explanation will be even more important. If your child is academically ahead of older siblings, then it may be necessary to talk in more depth about academic talent. A comparison

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to other exceptional talents, such as the athletic talent of a Wayne Gretzky or the figure skating of Jamie Salé, may help other family members to understand your child's unique ability. It is well accepted that an athletic, musical or artistic protégé should be encouraged to progress at an accelerated rate. This analogy may help the older children to understand that if younger siblings are not allowed to progress at the rate of learning they need, they would no longer be challenged and would likely become bored and frustrated.

Focusing on the gifted label is no more appropriate than it would be to focus on a child's identification as learning disabled. Use the term *gifted* sparingly and only in contexts that require that descriptor.

In most cases, children identified as gifted do not talk about their giftedness with other children. This is especially true of teenagers, who often consider it 'uncool' to refer to themselves as gifted around their peers. However, within the context of the family, children who are gifted, like all children, may at times use whatever means available to tease their siblings. If your child is using his or her giftedness to taunt other children in the family and make them feel less adequate, deal with this teasing as you would with any other kind of sibling squabbles. In some cases it may be appropriate to let siblings resolve smaller issues on their own. However, if this is an ongoing issue, a family discussion may be needed to make it clear that this kind of behaviour is unacceptable.

Ensure that children are not receiving the message from either parent that being gifted implies a superior standing to other siblings. All family members must be given a chance to be respected and valued for their unique abilities, whether they are gifted or not. One child may be recognized for athletic talent while another may display intellectual or creative strengths.

Remember, too, that research on siblings suggests that IQs of siblings are usually close, often within 10 points of each other. It may be that one child is identified as gifted while another is not, even though their IQ scores vary only slightly. Many factors influence test performance at any given time. If you have a child who seems as bright as the one identified as gifted, but did not get identified for programming, let him or her know that in your eyes they are equally able.

Share family decision making with all the children

Children can contribute ideas to decisions that affect the whole family. For example, you might try holding family meetings on a designated day of the week or whenever a decision needs making, or problem needs solving. Consider reserving a day or afternoon each month for a family event planned by your child (you may wish to set geographical or financial boundaries for this event, but let the child do whatever researching and planning are necessary). Letting each of your children participate in this kind of decision making shows them that each child is equal in the family, and gives everyone a greater commitment to family rules, routines and practices.

Strategies for communicating with your child

Clear communication about issues related to giftedness is important in developing your child's feelings of safety and security. Lawrence Greene, Director of the Developmental Learning Center in California, offers the following advice on communicating effectively with your child.

- Use language that your child can understand.
- Recognize and appreciate your child's point of view.
- Be aware of your child's fears and anxieties.
- Be willing to listen to what your child has to say.
- Be sensitive to the hidden messages in your child's words.

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- Recognize that, particularly with adolescents, values, attitudes and perspectives are being influenced by others outside the family.

Strategies for supporting children at home

- *Allow friendships with older children to develop, always keeping in mind physical development and safety issues.* Children who are gifted often relate to the maturity level of children older than themselves and can form lasting friendships.

- *Try viewing the world through your child's lens of heightened sensitivity.* Be compassionate and patient while your child develops the coping skills to deal with the sometimes harsh realities of the everyday world.

- *Evaluate what structure is essential and non-negotiable and what can be done differently to allow your child to spread his or her wings.* The demands of a structured society may be out of sync with the way your child thinks and operates.

- *Make your home a safe retreat where your children can be their "real" selves.* As they come to terms with their differences and develop coping skills, this will at times consume their energy. Let them recharge their batteries at home. Be a sounding board as they find their way in the outside world.

Extended family

Extended family can be a source of support for you and your child. Often grandparents, uncles and aunts can be advocates or mentors for children who are gifted, providing them with valuable opportunities to develop their skills and interests.

However, be sensitive to the fact that some extended family members may not be comfortable acknowledging or discussing a child's giftedness, particularly if they have a similar-aged child. For some people, the term "gifted" connotes superiority or elite status. People seem to understand, accept and even respect the notion of a gifted athlete, actor, artist or musician, but they may feel threatened by the term gifted when it is applied to the intellectual realm.

Unquestionably, all children have special gifts and equally deserve to be loved and cherished as individuals. However, not all children share the cluster of emotional and personal characteristics (some positive, some challenging) described in Chapter 2, nor do they have an IQ in a range that by definition is shared by only two to five percent of the population. As you learn more about giftedness, you will become better able to educate some family and community members about your child's special needs and your special challenges as a parent. It may take some time and much patience to gain their support and understanding.

The challenges of adolescence

Understandably, many parents of adolescents have concerns about their children. It is not unusual to be concerned about school achievement, especially when there are other ongoing issues such as peer pressure, smoking, drugs, alcohol and violence affecting our children every day. Adolescents who are gifted are not immune to such issues; in fact, adolescence may be a particularly challenging time for children who are gifted and for their families. As adolescents search for their identity and place in the world, the gifted label may represent one more variable in this already-complex search.

Many adolescents who are gifted both think and feel differently than other adolescents. Gifted individuals often have heightened emotions, particularly in adolescence. In other words, they may experience the world in *extra* sensitive, *extra* intense ways. This heightened emotion can affect adolescents in both positive and negative ways. Knowing about the social and emotional issues particular to adolescents who are gifted will help

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you better deal with your child, the other members of your family, and your child's school.

The heightened emotions often related to adolescent giftedness can surface in a number of positive ways. Your adolescent may:

- take relationships seriously and be a loyal friend to others
- have a greater awareness of the world, ask more questions about the state of affairs, be more critical about wrongdoings, or wish to get involved in a social-action group
- feel very strongly about such things as smoking, drugs and drunk driving, and become particular about the social group with which he or she belongs as a result
- consider school a top priority in his or her life.

Social concerns

- *Isolation*: Adolescents may feel different because of the gifted label. In order to continue excelling in school and being involved in certain activities, they may feel isolated from friends. They may begin to form negative opinions of themselves such as, "Something is wrong with me, I just seem so different from other kids."
- *Fitting in*: Some adolescents may attempt to reject their giftedness in order to fit in with peers. During adolescence, girls particularly tend to be more concerned about relationships than school achievement or future careers, and often show a drop in feelings of self-confidence and positive self-worth.
- *Shyness*: Some students will shy away from others for fear of not being accepted. They may feel unable to communicate on non-academic levels or with others who are not gifted. This may be most evident when attempting to talk to someone of the opposite sex about issues other than school-related topics.

Emotional concerns

- *Strong emotional attachments*: Adolescents who are gifted often form strong relationships with fewer friends. They may internalize events more than others, and often react more strongly than others to loss (e.g., friends moving away).
- *Fear of the unknown*: Individuals who are gifted may fear death more than others, and may also be more anxious about trying new things.
- *Anxiety*: Some adolescents who are gifted may experience intensified anxiety or even depression, often because their heightened sensitivity is making it difficult to cope with some of life's challenges. These students may exhibit behaviours such as refusing to go to school or to take part in extra-curricular activities.
- *Feelings of frustration and inadequacy*: Gifted students who have learning disabilities often feel that they don't belong in the gifted category. During elementary school, projects may be completed easily, but many gifted students, especially those with learning disabilities, find junior high more difficult. These students may become frustrated because they don't understand why they're having problems.

Intellectual concerns

- *Perfectionism*: Adolescents who are gifted sometimes feel they need to be perfect in everything they do. "Otherwise, why try at all?" they wonder. This tendency can be accompanied by feelings of failure when their view of perfection is not achieved.
- *Underachievement*: Underachievement is perhaps parents' most common concern about their adolescents who are gifted.

Adolescents who are gifted benefit from being in an environment where both their social–emotional and intellectual needs can be addressed. This should be a consideration when working with school staff to determine the best program for your son or daughter.

The gifted label is not always a positive one in the eyes of adolescents. Adolescents who are gifted may be perceived by other students as "geeks," "computer nerds" or "loners." Since adolescence

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is a time when peers have a great effect on how adolescents see themselves, it is a particularly critical time to assess the environment in which your children spend most of their social life.

There are no easy solutions to these issues. No two children are completely alike. Understanding how your adolescent views his or her giftedness is an important way to gain insight into these difficult questions.

Family pressures

During adolescence, the usual challenges may be compounded. There are a number of scenarios that may affect a family.

For example, other siblings may start to feel more competitive toward their sibling who is gifted. He or she may then start to fight back, either verbally or in other ways.

As parents, you may have higher expectations of your adolescent who is gifted than of your other children, making it difficult to balance the unique needs of the child who is gifted with the needs of your other children.

Adolescents may question the overall fairness of parental decisions; they may find it hard to back down when involved in an argument.

Parents may wonder why their teen is acting so immaturely when his or her IQ is so high; there may be a discrepancy between the teen's social–emotional development and his or her intellectual development. This also applies equally to younger children.

When your five-year-old speaks with the vocabulary of a nine-year-old, negotiates like a lawyer, and then has a meltdown because everyone expects him to act grown up but he's still just a child, what is a parent to do? It's all too easy for parents to fall into the habit of relating to children who are gifted at their speaking level or their reasoning level. Remember that right now they need your help at their emotional level—which in this case is still that of a five-year-old. Meet your child's emotional needs first.

Strategies for dealing with the challenges of adolescence

- *Talk to your teen about the behaviours that you see, rather than making assumptions about what he or she might be feeling or thinking.* You may be surprised by the awareness your child will demonstrate regarding his or her own situation. Avoid overly negative or accusatory talk about the behaviours: the way you speak to your children will affect the way they view themselves.

- *Focus on your teen's strengths.* Encourage him or her to find activities in or out of school that will build self-confidence and a sense of belonging.

- *If your teen seems overwhelmed at times, help him or her to break down problems or tasks into small chunks.* Work together to determine the pros and cons for decision-making processes. Even older teens need this type of help once in a while.

- *Talk to other parents of teens who are gifted.* Talking about your issues will help you realize that you are not alone in your experiences.

- *Support your teen in meeting his or her own standards.* Teens who are gifted do not want or need their parents to set all the standards for them. For example, parents might know a teen is academically gifted in math and expect that teen to devote time and energy earning higher math marks and winning competitions when this teen is more interested in devoting himself to excellence in another area such as sports or the arts.

- *Read about adolescence and giftedness.* Consider attending workshops for parents on giftedness and gifted education.

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- *Be alert to extreme changes in your adolescent's school performance, appearance, friendships or behaviour.* If necessary, contact a professional: your school counsellor, family doctor or a psychologist.

- *Remember that there are many factors and influences in your child's life over which you have no control.* As he or she grows and matures, your adolescent child will need you to pull back and let him or her advocate for him or herself.

- *Have confidence in your teen's ability to handle challenges.* It is important to remind yourself that, although gifted children's sensitivity can make them vulnerable to difficult situations, they are also capable of becoming stronger and more flexible as they go along. It is your job to be there for your child, but it is also your job to give him or her room to develop on his or her own. Children who are constantly shielded and protected may never gain the skills they need to cope with challenging circumstances.

Maintaining balance

Sometimes parents become so immersed in helping their children that they forget their children are watching and learning from them. Parents' behaviours and attitudes teach children how they should feel about learning, how they should respond to challenges, how they should act when things do not go their way, and how they should value their own personal interests and needs. Children who are gifted need to know that the world will not come to an end if they are having a problem. One of the ways they learn this is by observing how their parents respond when a problem surfaces. If children are too worried about causing stress for their parents they may react by becoming less communicative and not tell their parents about difficulties they are having at school or the community.

What parents most need in their relationships with their children is balance. Parents are important to their children, and children are important to their parents, but both are individuals. Balance comes through parents stepping back and freeing themselves from over identifying with everything their children experience and do.

Sometimes parents need to give themselves some "fresh air." They may need support, people to talk to, feedback and a sense of perspective. Parents need to find some time in the day or week to do something they love—rediscover a hobby or an interest. Children also benefit from seeing their parents involved in things, interested in the world, enjoying life. Nothing is so energizing to children as a parent showing great interest in some activity or pursuit—from martial arts to gardening to politics to basketball. Instead of "hovering over their child's shoulder," parents can let their children hover over theirs and let them see what they enjoy doing, what they love learning.

Teaching your child self-advocacy skills

Self-advocacy means speaking out and acting for yourself. Children first learn self-advocacy skills by observing how parents, teachers and others advocate on their behalf.

Children who are gifted need to learn how to advocate effectively for themselves. They need to learn strategies for problem solving and setting goals. They need to identify and understand their strengths and needs, and take responsibility for their own learning. This process needs to begin early and to be practised actively in the adolescent years.

Some children may not self-advocate effectively because they:

- lack knowledge of themselves as learners and cannot clearly describe their abilities, their needs or the conditions that best promote their learning

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- do not know who to talk to about making changes or accommodations to promote their learning, or they don't know what to ask for
- do not want to be thought of as different or trouble makers
- have encountered people at home, school or the community who don't understand why differentiated education is appropriate and important for students who are gifted.

Strategies for helping your child develop self-advocacy skills

- *Talk to your child about the concept of giftedness and about his or her particular strengths and needs.* Parents should explain assessment results so that their children understand their own abilities and learning needs, and the implications for their schooling and life.

- *Begin to involve your child in decision making about his or her own education.* Encourage participation in the IPP process. Children's input and involvement should increase as they proceed through the grades.

- *Encourage your child to evaluate his or her own performance.* Children can increase their self-monitoring skills through goal-setting and by working with parents and teachers to identify criteria for evaluating their own work.

- *Provide specific feedback and observations that will help your child understand how he or she learns best.* For example, "You seem to write better when you get a chance to share the information with an audience."

- *Help your child prepare for meetings or discussions with teachers, or other situations involving his or her education.* Model and role-play appropriate interactions.

- *Help your child be organized and prepared.* Self-advocates need to be informed and organized in order to be effective.

- *Help your child to set appropriate and realistic goals for learning and to review success in achieving the goals.* Teach your child how to make goals tangible and realistic. One strategy is to make goals SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely.

- *Recognize how difficult self-advocacy can be.* Support the attempts your child makes.

- *Understand that self-advocacy skills need to be demonstrated, role-played, practised and evaluated.* Provide extensive guidance in the middle and junior high years, with greater expectations for independence in the high school years.

- *Consult with your child's teachers about strategies and suggestions for teaching self-advocacy skills.*

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Exploring THE Community

SEEKING OPPORTUNITIES AND BUILDING SUPPORT

Community involvement

Many students who are gifted have special learning needs that can be met through involvement in the community. The term *community* encompasses a wide range of settings, from the neighbour next door, to local clubs and organizations, to the Internet with its global information exchange. Specific examples of different types of community involvement are discussed below.

Mentors

Is your child passionately interested in a particular subject or occupation? If so, consider arranging a mentorship. Mentorships are more common for middle and high school students. Although there are exceptions, generally younger children who are gifted tend to be interested in many things and less inclined to focus on one particular topic for an extended period of time.

Whether your child has an interest in art, science, technology, politics, nature or literary pursuits, look for a person with special expertise in that area, such as a local talent or a retired specialist. A mentor needs to be sensitive to your child's abilities and learning style and enthusiastic about the subject your daughter or son will be exploring.

To find a mentor, talk to your friends, other parents of children who are gifted, teachers, universities, business people, members of professional associations and people in local arts groups. Where you look depends on the subject your child is interested in. It is not always easy to find a suitable mentor. You may have to be creative in your search. If your child's unique area of interest just cannot be found within your local community, try the Internet. International Telementor programs are available to connect children with mentors across the globe.

Parent and child must both feel comfortable with the mentor. If you have misgivings, trust them. If your child does not take to the mentor or if they don't seem to make a good match, do not try to force the relationship. Keep looking.

The mentor must be willing to follow the child's interests and support their talents. There is no set sequence or program of study in a mentorship. The goal is to support what the child wants to learn and do.

When you are considering this kind of one-on-one arrangement, you, your child and the potential mentor need to talk about how the two will work together. Be sure to involve your child both in the planning stages and after the mentorship gets going. It is important that your child feel free to say, "I don't want to go in this direction. I'm more interested in this."

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Once your daughter or son begins working with the mentor, be flexible about how long the arrangement may last. If your child is enjoying the experience, keep the arrangement going for as long as your child wants. Feel free to end it whenever your child loses interest or moves on to another passion.

Locally sponsored programs

Many service organizations sponsor national and international student exchanges, and a wide variety of other programs for youth. For example, the Mr. Speakers Alberta Youth forum sponsors Grade 10 youth with an interest in politics to represent their constituencies in a two-day youth forum. Students representing MLAs from across the province learn the basics of parliamentary procedure and conduct a youth parliament session at the Alberta Legislature. Your local Chamber of Commerce will have a directory of all service clubs in your area.

Contests and competitions

Talented youth are often motivated to enter contests sponsored by the local business community, media, school or youth organizations. Everyone needs a forum to showcase his or her talent and a locally-sponsored contest can be a source of motivation and inspiration.

There are a variety of sources for appropriate contests. A few suggestions include:

- Alberta Learning in partnership with the National Geographic Society has recently made the National Geographic Web site, www.nationalgeographic.com/education/, available to all Alberta schools. Included on that site are numerous opportunities for individual challenge activities, as well as parent and student resources and contests such as the National Geographic Bee.

- The Math Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association sponsors several mathematics contests for students at various levels. Your local school will have specific information on academic contests.

- Alberta Children's Services sponsors Great Kids Awards for children and youth between the ages of five and 18 who contribute in a positive way to their schools, communities and families.

Camps

There are camps for children of all ages, focusing on science, writing, art, sports, nature and just about any other interest your child may have. Each year the Alberta Associations for Bright Children compiles information for interested families regarding weekend and summer camps for youth.

Clubs

Becoming a member of any club with a special focus not only develops your child's skills in that area of interest but may also let him or her build lasting friendships. Through organizations such as Guides and Scouts, 4H clubs, Junior Forest Wardens and other community-oriented service clubs, youth can learn the importance of community service and develop leadership skills that will serve them throughout their lives. Youth organizations also offer the opportunity for children to engage in provincial, national and international meetings.

If your child has an avid interest and there is no local organization available, encourage him or her to start a new club or group. Often a teacher, parent or community expert in the field may be willing to help out. The possibilities are limited only by a child's imagination. Following are some examples of student-initiated clubs:

- Chess Club
- Astronomy Club
- Poetry Club
- Art Club
- Dinosaur Club
- Antique Auto Club.

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School is not the only venue for clubs—many groups are community-based. Rock bands and other musical groups are often the outcome of like-minded youth who find one another through a common passion for music.

Community theatre

Opportunities to participate in community theatre are available across the province from small rural communities to large urban centres. Whether your child dreams of starring on Broadway, writing the next theatrical hit, or is more interested in the technical aspects of theatre, community theatre provides a range of opportunities. If your child needs a mentor in the performing arts, community theatre may be the venue where you will find one. Community theatre relies on volunteering so it can become a family affair with a role for every member, either backstage or on the stage.

Athletics

If your child is interested in joining a sports team, almost every sport has a local organization available. Many talented athletes find the outlet they need within the school as a member of a team sport. If your child has advanced skills and teams are usually picked according to age, talk to the coaches and see if your child can move up a level. As with any talent, supporting your child's sport may require substantial time associated with individual or team practice, and may become a long-term family commitment.

Work experience

Optional courses in the senior high program include Career and Technology Studies (CTS). The CTS courses may be locally developed and may include work experience and independent study courses. Check with the school guidance counsellor: this may be your child's opportunity to work for the local newspaper, architect or veterinarian to see what it is really like, while earning required credits for senior high school completion at the same time.

Parent support groups

Find out if support groups for parents organize special events for children who are gifted in your community. For example, some local Associations for Bright Children (ABC) offer Super Saturday programs for children.

How much community involvement is appropriate?

Most young children cannot handle more than one or two outside commitments a week. Older children may be able to balance several community-oriented interests. However, as every child is unique, there is no standard rule that is best for all. The child's age, parents' ability to allocate the time, financial considerations, and other siblings' extra-curricular activities all impact on the activity level and choices for children who are gifted. Also, the interests of the child need to be weighed with the best interest of all family members.

Many children who are gifted become interested in everything and want to do it all. In and out of school, you may have a child whose interest is piqued for the short term, only to find that halfway through a project they no longer have the motivation to continue. Yet, many parents believe that the commitment to stay involved in an activity for at least a school year is just as important as which specific activity the child chooses.

If you have a child who wants to do it all, he or she may need help in setting priorities and committing to one or two activities over a year. The process of listing all possibilities, determining what is reasonable and assisting your child in making good choices while allowing him or her to try a variety of activities will be as important as what he or she chooses to do. Many children who are gifted will try something different each year before settling on a longer-term commitment to an area of interest.

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How can I help to inform parents and others in the community about gifted education?

Talk to your child's teacher about offering information sessions on gifted education for parents. Some school divisions offer combined events for parents and educators, either as evening, weekend or summer sessions. Involving all partners in education helps to develop good communication between home and school.

Ask your child's teacher or administrator who might be available to speak on the topic of gifted education, either within your school or in the larger school community. For example, you may wish to bring a speaker into a school council meeting. You might partner with a community organization to sponsor a speaker on the topic of gifted education for local parents, educators and community members.

Look for parent education opportunities with the Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia. Visit www.arpdc.ab.ca to link to events in your region.

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Bumps ALONG THE Way

COPING WITH UNDERACHIEVEMENT, PERFECTIONISM, HEIGHTENED SENSITIVITY, DEPRESSION, FRUSTRATION AND INTROVERSION

Challenges

Children who are gifted may have unique qualities and unequal growth in many areas. They may also experience heightened feelings. While these special traits can be positive, they can also create bumps in the road. Children who are gifted may face a variety of challenges, including underachievement, perfectionism, heightened sensitivity, depression and frustration. Parents need to understand these challenges so they can work with school staff to find successful strategies to help children over these bumps.

Underachievement

The term "underachieving," in relation to giftedness, describes the performance of children who express their giftedness in extra-curricular activities or at home but their achievement level at school falls far below their actual cognitive ability. This discrepancy is not caused by an underlying learning disability, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, or any other disorder that may be affecting their achievement. The most common complaint about underachievers is, "They won't do their work."

If you are uncertain whether your child is underachieving, talk with your child's teacher and consider the following questions. Does you child *usually* or *often*:

- love doing projects at home, yet seem apathetic about school?
- express their giftedness in extra-curricular activities and at home, but not in the classroom?
- appear frustrated, unsure, complacent, irresponsible, defensive, depressed, distracted or bored?
- daydream, procrastinate or avoid taking risks?
- appear disinterested in school and focus on the negative aspects of learning?
- quit new activities if he or she isn't having immediate success?
- have difficulty accepting both criticism and compliments from others?
- tend to be inflexible, avoiding new approaches or ideas?

If the answer is yes to several of these questions, underachieving may be an issue for your child. However, it is important to ensure that your child is not demonstrating characteristics of depression, anxiety, or learning or attention disorders. If you are unsure, consult with relevant school staff and/or your physician.

Children underachieve in school for various reasons—poor self-image, a desire to fit in with others, learning disabilities, unusual or unrecognized talents, stress or boredom. For children who are underachieving, the motivation to succeed may be compromised by any number of factors, which can create the illusion that their motivation is simply missing. As a parent, it is important to consider what factors may be

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influencing your child's behaviour. Some specific causes of underachievement in children who are gifted include:

- lack of a future vision or dream to work toward
- problems within the family that divert children's thinking and effort
- the desire to fit in with their peer group
- the desire to rebel
- the desire to avoid participating in special programming, such as the International Baccalaureate
- feelings of stress based on the need to please others or their own unrealistic expectations
- disinterest in the curriculum topics and related learning activities
- work that is too easy or too difficult
- work that is meaningless and repetitive to the child, resulting in little effort.

The most common assumption by parents is that boredom with school work is the cause of underachievement, and that school work, teachers' instructional styles, and the curriculum are all at fault. This assumption can lead to the conclusion that a quick solution to boredom is to increase the difficulty and workload for the child. This can be counterproductive for children who are already disengaged. While these can be contributing factors, it is important to fully consider what other factors might be at work.

Students who underachieve can be disruptive or withdrawn in the classroom. They may engage in power struggles with their teachers. Or they may become apathetic, surrendering their passion for learning and not completing tasks. The most serious consequence of underachievement is not graduating from senior high school. It's important that students have meaningful and challenging work to do at school and receive appropriate guidance and support at home.

Strategies for overcoming underachievement

- *Listen and respond to your child's concerns.* Talk with your child about what, specifically, he or she finds difficult or uncomfortable about school.

- *Think about your child's strengths and interests, comparing these with topics and activities he or she is doing at school.* Look over assignments. What might be more challenging or stimulating? Independent projects? More choice of topics? More hands-on activities? More opportunities to be creative? Work with teachers to identify appropriate ways that your child can enrich his or her learning experience and demonstrate knowledge without increasing the workload.

- *Talk to your child's teachers about your concerns.* Explain what you have observed about your child's preferred learning style, interests and talents. Discuss ways to encourage achievement. Be specific about your child's low level of performance and look for possible solutions. For example, "I think Mason will do better on his writing assignments if he has an opportunity to share the assignment with others." Teachers are usually open to suggestions and willing to make adjustments.

- *Minimize anxiety about learning.* Create a non-threatening place for reading, studying and taking learning risks at home.

- *Help your child be comfortable with both wins and losses.* Recognize improvement, and be there in times of disappointment.

- *Provide interesting activities and experiences outside of school.* Look for opportunities to link school-related topics to meaningful experiences in the community. These kinds of related experiences may stimulate your child's interest in current school topics.

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- *Speak positively about school and your child's teachers.* Listen to your child's concerns about school, but encourage him or her to see the other point of view. Ask questions like "What do you think the teacher thought?" or "Why do you think the teacher may want you to do that?"

- *Agree on and communicate expectations.* It is important for children to get the same clear message about school expectations from both parents. If one parent shields the child from the other's expectations, the child learns to play the two parents against each other.

- *Ensure your standards are appropriate for your child's abilities, neither too low nor too high.* If you need help identifying reasonable academic expectations, consult your child's teachers, the school counsellor or the district psychologist.

- *Treat all of your child's subjects as equally important and relevant.* Talk about limitations as "things you are working on," rather than "things you are bad at." "Working on" implies that your child can and probably will improve if he or she puts in some time and effort. Although some talents and skills may never be as strong as others, improvement is always possible.

- *Allow your child to experience a feeling of accomplishment for finding his or her way through a difficult task.* Children develop feelings of confidence and competence when they are able to overcome obstacles on their own. If you rush to assist, instruct or direct whenever things get difficult, you are sending a negative message that your child isn't smart enough or competent enough to figure things out for him or herself.

- *If you feel that you need to assist with homework, use questioning to encourage your child to work more independently.* Good questions can activate thinking, and help your child feel more personal success. Consider questions such as the following.
  - Can you think of another way to do this?
  - Can you show me how you got that answer?
  - Where have you seen a problem like this before?
  - What strategy could we use to solve this problem?
  - Where else can we look to get the answer?

- *Provide support and encouragement.* If your child tries and still doesn't understand, coach him or her by talking through the problem, concept or skill, but don't do the problem for your child. Psychologist Sylvia Rimm suggests the following steps:
  1. Model the task.
  2. Your child does it once as you watch.
  3. Then encourage him or her to work independently.

- *Help your child understand the connection between effort and results.* Does your child understand that studying spelling words during the week improves test results on Friday? Or that proofreading an essay for English may positively influence the final mark? Some children seem to think that magic or luck, rather than effort and hard work will remedy an academic shortfall. When your child's effort shows improved results, call attention to this positive change. Discuss examples of how effort and results have worked in other areas of your child's life, such as sports or arts. For example, remind your child of how practising the piano improved his or her skill in playing a particular song, or how shooting baskets at the park improved his or her points per game.

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- *Encourage your child's commitment to learning by requiring him or her to spend a designated amount of time each day on academic activities.* Ten minutes of homework per grade per day is a helpful rule-of-thumb. For example, this would mean 20 minutes per day for a child in Grade 2. These activities should include assigned homework, as well as reading, reviewing notes for classes or working on other projects. Allow for some time to unwind after school, but do not let studies wait until the late evening hours. Some children must have the freedom to work on their own schedule so experiment to find out what works for your child and your family.

Perfectionism

What is good and necessary for ultimate high achievement—that is, setting high and demanding (but not unattainable) goals for oneself—can be either a positive or a negative force in a person's life. Children who are gifted often pursue excellence and are concerned about accomplishment. This heightened perception may also apply to failure and what it looks like. The desire to achieve excellence may be intense. If the high standards they set are not met students may feel inferior or defeated. On the other hand, they may feel unfulfilled if they do not strive for the quality of which they are capable.

Students who are gifted may also strive for excellence because they tend to:

- set standards according to their mental age rather than their chronological age
- set standards appropriate for older friends or adults that they tend to socialize with
- come to expect success and fear the failures they have had little experience with
- realize that with easy work the only challenge is doing it perfectly.

The literature suggests that there are two types of perfectionism. "Normal" perfectionists get a sense of pleasure from labours of effort. Where as there are other individuals who suffer from damaging, unrealistic perfectionism. These types of perfectionists seem unable to feel satisfaction because in their own eyes they never do things well enough.

Five characteristics of perfectionists seem to contribute to underachievement:

- procrastination (may be an avoidance tactic)
- fear of failure (may play out as apathy)
- an all-or-nothing mindset
- avoiding failure through complete inertia, or by searching for a perfect solution rather than choosing a "less perfect" possibility
- workaholism (self-identity is tied to external rewards, difficulty delegating or saying "no").

In particular, young girls who are gifted may believe that they must be perfect in everything they attempt to do as a student, athlete, artist, child and friend, as well as being attractive in appearance. There is also a tendency for girls who are gifted to attribute their accomplishments to external forces, to luck, or being in the right place at the right time, not to their own efforts, resulting in what some people call the "imposter syndrome." These girls may strive to become even more perfect as they downplay their hard-won achievements and impose impossibly high standards on themselves.

Linda Silverman, a researcher on social emotional dimensions of individuals who are gifted, believes that perfectionism is the least understood aspect of giftedness. It is often perceived as a problem to be fixed. Silverman suggests that perfectionism is part of the experience of being gifted, and is a two-edged sword with amazing potential to bring an individual toward either achievement or despair.

Perfectionism can become an issue for some children who are gifted. Children may set unrealistic standards for themselves based on their advanced reasoning ability even though other skill areas may not be as well-developed. These individuals often believe that they are what they do. Perfectionism is a pattern of characteristics and behaviours, including compulsiveness about work habits, over-concern for details, unrealistically high standards and rigid routines (Kerr, 1991, p. 141). As a parent, you may want to ask yourself: "Are these behaviours barriers for my child?" and, "Do they prevent my child from experiencing success and happiness?"

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Use the following questions to identify signs of perfectionism and determine if this may be an issue for your child. It can sometimes be difficult to distinguish between underachievement and perfectionism. At times, a child can experience both. Some of the questions you asked yourself to decide whether your child is an underachiever also apply to perfectionism.

Does your child *usually* or *often*:

- avoid trying new things for fear of failure?
- quit new activities if he or she is not having immediate success?
- avoid learning situations that may involve risk and the possibility of low grades?
- procrastinate, fret over details and leave work unfinished (or never start it) out of fear it won't be good enough?
- seem less productive than classmates because he or she overworks and overanalyzes everything, and therefore gets less done?
- focus on mistakes, rather than on what was done well?
- set unrealistic goals and then become self-critical when they are not achieved?
- set intentionally low goals, so he or she knows they will be achieved?
- have trouble accepting criticism?
- become discouraged with any mark below an A?
- feel great when she or he is first or best at something and feel terrible when not?
- punish him or herself for not being "the best?"
- fail to recognize improvement?
- have a hard time accepting compliments or feedback from others?
- assume that others do not have the same high standards?
- tend to be inflexible, avoiding new approaches or ideas?
- tend to tightly control emotions, not wanting others to know how he or she is feeling?
- have difficulty separating his or her sense of self from what he or she has accomplished?

If you answered yes to several of these questions, perfectionism may be an issue for your child.

Perfectionism can develop at various stages for various reasons, but for many children it is simply a part of their personality. Too often, parents are blamed for causing their child's perfectionism. It's assumed that they pressure their children with their own unrealistic expectations. However, many perfectionist children are the product of relaxed, easy-going parents with realistic expectations. It seems possible that certain children are simply born with the type of temperament that leads to perfectionism tendencies.

It would be unwise to try to root out perfectionism completely, for it can be used in a positive way to achieve excellence. Without perfectionism, there would be no Olympic champions, no great artists or writers, no scientific breakthroughs and no great moral leaders.

However, some children may become debilitated by their vision of what they can or should be. These paralyzed perfectionists are so terrified of doing something wrong, they actually accomplish very little. Assignments do not get done and papers do not get handed in. "What if I don't do it right?" becomes a reason not to try at all. In extreme cases, children may develop compulsive behaviours that require professional medical or psychological assistance. Some give up from exhaustion or frustration. Some resort to angry rebellion. Some settle into mediocre levels of work that hide their earlier academic promise.

As parents, be vigilant that your children's perfectionism doesn't take over their lives or drive them to underachieve. Use patience and understanding to positively channel their perfectionism.

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Strategies for helping your child cope with perfectionism

- *Be aware of the expectations you may have created for your child.* Ask yourself: Are my expectations reasonable? Am I allowing my child freedom to be an individual, express him or herself, have fun, fool around, make mistakes—be a child?

- *Take a look at your own perfectionist qualities.* Are you too hard on yourself? Are you setting the example for your children that you want to set—of someone who enjoys their own accomplishments and doesn't criticize themselves all the time for not doing better?

- *Assist your child in setting reasonable and reachable expectations.* Help your child to recognize that he or she has areas of greater and lesser talents and interests. It is unreasonable for children to expect that they will perform equally well in all subjects. If an individual has high math ability, he or she can work toward—and probably achieve—an A in math. But he or she may not be able to perform at the same level in creative writing or social studies classes if his or her talents and interests do not lie in these areas. These children need help to recognize when they are expecting too much of themselves, and to choose what does and does not call for perfect results. Which things require the greatest investment of time and energy? Which things simply need to be finished—to be "good enough?" Insist on adequate effort, and reassure them that learning gaps can be addressed, but let them know that it is okay to get less than the best grades in some subjects.

- *Help your child develop a deeper understanding of perfectionism and how it can affect others.* Help your child distinguish between perfectionistic attitudes toward self and others. It is admirable to maintain high standards for yourself, but it is unfair to expect others to conform to these standards.

- *Help your child develop time management skills.* Many children need help with skills such as planning and time management. Children may set standards for themselves based on their advanced reasoning ability but may not have the necessary skills to reach these standards. For example, a kindergarten child could have the intellectual ability to do a project at the third-grade level, but may still fail to complete the project because he or she has not learned to plan and manage time to complete the project successfully. Teach your child to set priorities and avoid over-committing him or her. Show your child how to manage his or her time and achieve goals by breaking large, long-term projects into small, manageable steps. Introduce a time management log for working on projects that need to be completed in a specific time period.

Time management log		
Date	Goal for this work period	Work completed

- *Refrain from criticism.* Perfectionist children often criticize themselves for their lack of perfection. Therefore, choose your words carefully, and be aware of your body language and facial expressions. A frown or a look of disappointment may cancel out your positive and encouraging statements. However, if your child does not like what he or she did, do not dismiss his or her feelings ("What do you mean you don't like your poster? It's wonderful!"). Listen to what your child says, help him or her identify why he or she is unhappy with the work, express what you appreciated about the work, and if necessary, then explore how things might be done differently in the future.

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- *Focus on your child's strengths and successes.* When your child evaluates his or her own performance, help him or her to see what went right rather than "what I did wrong." Turn your child's attention away from flaws in his or her work and toward what he or she has learned and accomplished. You might say, "You've told me you're disappointed with some parts of your project. Now tell me what's good about what you've done." Also, point out accomplishments, since perfectionists tend to forget about past successes and see the future as full of opportunities to fail.

- *Use praise discerningly.* Do not lavish praise on your child for excelling or dwell on his or her achievements, especially in your child's presence. Parents can express appreciation of their children's successes without making them feel that these accomplishments alone are what make them special or define their identity. Children who are praised all the time start believing that what they do is more important than who they are. Believing this, they may be unable to accept any praise, since nothing they do meets their own impossible standards.

- *Show that your caring is not based on your child's performance.* Perfectionists tend to believe that they are what they do. They equate themselves with their grades, their skill on the basketball court, or their ability to win roles in school plays. Be careful not to over-celebrate success or overanalyze less than perfect results. Parents need to show perfectionist children that they love and accept them for who they are, not for what they do or achieve. Express as least as much appreciation of your child's interests and individuality (what makes him or her special) as of his or her achievements (high grades and awards). Point out positive actions that have nothing to do with ability. Commend your child for taking risks, even when things do not turn out as planned. Notice appropriate ways of handling failure and thoughtful interactions with other people. Applaud your child's *efforts*. Encourage *process* over product—what your child *learns* rather than what he or she accomplishes or produces.

- *Introduce your child to new experiences.* Encourage your child to choose activities completely different from what he or she would typically select (perfectionists will often choose the activities that have been successful for them in the past). When your child is about to start something new, help him or her plan for possible challenges. Talk about what might go wrong and what to do if that happens. It might be easier to get your child to try new things if you set a time limit on his or her participation. For example, if you are trying to convince a reluctant daughter to attend day camp, you might say, "I'd like you to go for the first three days. Then we can decide together if you should finish out the week." Perfectionists often enjoy new activities, if you can just get them through the door. It is also important to involve your child in activities that are not graded or judged. Encourage him or her to try things "just for fun," and to spend more time doing what he or she loves to do—taking walks, reading mysteries, playing with the dog, or playing board games with friends or siblings.

- *Create a safe environment.* Make your home a place where effort is more important than winning or losing. Make it a place where your child does not fear negative consequences for being average. Let your child know through your words and actions that you support him or her no matter what. Children who are gifted often need to practise the learning cycle: bump into limits, try again, try a different approach, practise, improve and succeed. Encourage your child's sense of humour and teach the value of patience—with him or herself and with the process of learning. Help your child lighten up about things that do not go as planned.

- *Let your child know that mistakes are okay, that everyone makes them, and that they are part of the learning process.* Remind your child that nobody is perfect and nobody is

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good at everything. Acknowledge your own mistakes and those of others, including other gifted individuals. The following story may help children understand this: "Thomas Edison tried 1500 different filaments for the light bulb before finding the right one. After the last experiment, an assistant asked, 'Well Mr. Edison, how do you feel about having 1500 failures to your credit?' Edison replied, 'No, they weren't failures. We now know 1500 light bulb filaments that don't work!'" (Walker 1991, p. 68). Teach your child that mistakes are for learning, and encourage him or her to ask questions and take intellectual risks. One father said to his children, "Anything worth doing is worth doing wrong because it is only by doing it wrong that you can learn to do it right."

- *Talk to your child about strategies to help him or her deal with perfectionism.* The following are some ideas you could suggest.
  - *Keep going—do not start over.* Identify *parts* of your assignment that might need revising, then go ahead and revise them. But don't throw everything out and go back to the beginning.
  - *Catch yourself trying to be perfect.* Whenever you realize that your perfectionism is showing, stop and think about it. What can you do to change your feelings or behaviours? Maybe you can give yourself an order—"Hey, you, snap out of it!" For example, imagine that you have just finished the illustrations for your social studies report when suddenly you notice a small mistake. Before you start doing the whole thing over again, ask yourself, "Will anyone besides me even notice the difference?" Force yourself to say, "I'm done. This is good enough."
  - *Get comfortable with feedback.* Creative people want others to tell them about their work. They use that information to improve, or as sources of new ideas. Ask your teachers, parents or trusted friends to review your work or listen to your ideas, then ask them what they think. Try to really listen to what they say, then sort through the information they give you and act on the advice you believe to be the most worthwhile.
  - *Quit making up rules.* Follow your teacher's guidelines for assignments, and try not to add unreasonable ones of your own. If the teacher has told you what is expected, why make more work for yourself? At home, talk to your parents about their expectations for your performance. Are you in agreement? Or are you writing in extra rules and expectations?
- *Recognize that there are positive and negative aspects to perfectionism.* Discuss how the choice is ours as to how to use it. We can let it paralyze us with fear of failure, or we can use it for unparalleled excellence. We can use this drive to help create a better world.

Heightened sensitivity—Feeling things deeply

Children who are gifted may feel things and empathize with others more deeply than most children their age. This heightened sensitivity may show itself in several ways, including:

- picking up quickly on a person's feelings
- curiosity about the meaning of life and death
- sleeplessness
- worrying about things that are difficult to change, such as homelessness or the environment
- expressing feelings through the fine arts—music, drawing or dance
- crying and reacting with anger or frustration
- physical symptoms such as stomachaches, headaches or other ailments
- difficulty handling criticism or rejection
- being overly selective about food and clothing
- difficulty weathering the normal ups and downs of daily life.

The positive side of these heightened feelings is that sensitive children may be more careful with

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the feelings of others and more likely to stick up for their friends and family members. They may also be more responsive to their environment. They may consider more perspectives when solving problems. However, as a parent, it is important to note whether this heightened sensitivity is interfering with your child's ability to enjoy relationships, school or other important events in their life.

Along with sensitivity often comes intensity. Children who are gifted often have high energy—both physical and psychological. Kazimierz Dabrowski, a renowned psychologist, explored a theory of emotional development that describes an expanded awareness and heightened capacity to respond to various stimuli. He found that gifted and creative individuals often manifest these characteristics more intensely in three areas.

- Intellectual – heightened capacity for concentration, problem solving and learning; tendency toward avid reading, detailed planning and curiosity; a need to ask probing questions; interest in abstraction and moral thinking.
- Imaginational – heightened sense of imagination, inventiveness and magical fantasy (creation of private worlds or imaginary friends); poetic, dramatic or artistic abilities.
- Emotional – heightened capacity for extreme emotions and strong attachments; tendency toward somatic expressions (tense stomach, sinking heart, blushing, flushing) and concern with death; feelings of fear, anxiety and guilt.

Children who are gifted may feel the intellectual, imaginational and emotional areas more strongly than others. Often they need to be assured that these so-called over-excitabilities are normal and come with the territory of being gifted.

Sharing feelings can help you understand what your child is going through and look for solutions, and can also help children gain perspective on their emotions. Because of the high standards they often hold for themselves, these children sometimes suppress their fears and concerns rather than admit to a perceived weakness. Look for ways to encourage your children to share their feelings and emotions.

Strategies for helping your child deal with sensitivity

- *Let your sensitive child be who he or she is.* Acknowledge and respect your child's feelings.

- *Look for volunteer opportunities in the community.* If your child feels strongly about the plight of others, such as people who are homeless, do a community service as a family. Help your child understand that individuals can make a positive difference in the world.

- *Assure your child that he or she is not responsible for everything.* Help your child understand that they can change some things but other things must be left to adults to solve.

- *Encourage your child to talk about his or her feelings.* Children need a vocabulary of wide-ranging "feeling words" so that they can identify and describe how they feel.

Examples of feeling words

Anger	***Happiness***
frustrated	passionate
mad	cheerful
violent	joyful
spiteful	bubbly

Sadness	***Guilt***
gloomy	humiliated
lonely	embarrassed
discouraged	intimidated
glum	sheepish

- *Talk with your child about your own feelings.* Sensitive children are more aware of their parents' emotional ups and downs, so be prepared to discuss your emotional state or feelings with your child so that he or she realizes that you experience various emotions also. Be selective when doing this and base what you share on your child's emotional maturity, not his or her intellectual level.

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Strategies for encouraging your child to express feelings

- *When you are doing an activity with your child, casually bring up school and ask how it is going.* Children often loosen up and express themselves more readily while going for a walk or playing a game.

- *Ask open-ended questions.* "If you could change anything you wanted to in your life, what would you change?" Encourage your child to answer by sharing your own response.

- *Take your child for an outing.* Give him or her your undivided attention and you may find yourself having a great conversation. As one parent said, "I feel like I know my child better since we started going out for breakfast together on Saturdays."

- *Some children benefit from expressing their thoughts and feelings through art or stories.* Consider how your child's special talents could help him or her. Depending on your child's abilities and preferences, you may want to encourage him or her to create a story with you about a character who, for example, is teased, is afraid to talk in class, or has a pet that dies. Stories work particularly well for gifted children who are not able to describe how they feel but who can make the connection between a story and themselves.

- *Encourage your child to keep a journal.* Encourage writing about what excites, exhilarates, frightens or troubles him or her. Journaling is an effective way for young people to reflect, analyze and strategize about things that concern them.

- *Seek out books about characters who face different kinds of difficult situations.* Ask a librarian to guide you to books about specific themes or challenges. You might read the book too, or read it with your child, so you can talk together about how individuals cope with problems. If the book is a work of fiction, you could also discuss other ways the book might have ended or a character might have behaved.

- *Informal chatting while sharing a book or watching a television show or movie can sometimes lead to good discussions.* Look for opportunities to discuss what characters might be feeling and why they might be feeling that way.

- *Create a role-play about a challenging situation.* Ask your child which role he or she would like you to play.

- *Encourage your child to use the creative arts—writing, dance, drama, storytelling, singing, drawing, sculpting—to show how he or she would like life to be.* Children can depict through art a near-perfect school, the friends they would like to have, the ideal home or bedroom, the places they would like to visit, and so on. Often, such creations will identify parts of life that children have conflicted or unresolved feelings about.

- *Encourage your child to read biographies as a way to envision the future.* Children have a difficult time seeing beyond the present; learning about the childhoods of distinguished men and women can be inspirational. Stories of accomplished people from diverse backgrounds who failed many times, suffered setbacks, and endured the disapproval of others without giving up can provide powerful role models for children.

Depression

Sometimes underachievement, perfectionism, heightened emotion or other factors can lead students who are gifted to become depressed. Behavioural clues may include a drop in school grades, loss of interest in extra-curricular activities or running away from home. School counsellors, family doctors, and psychologists can be helpful in identifying those students who may require professional assistance.

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Depression can result from several sources, including:

- too much pressure
- loneliness
- dependence on extrinsic motivation
- extreme competitiveness
- perfectionism.

Many children and teens are faced with problems that could lead to depression. However, children who are gifted have added stresses that may make them more vulnerable. Some of these vulnerabilities include:

- feeling unpopular with their peers
- being picked on by peers for being different
- having difficulty making friends because of introversion
- feeling pressure to live up to others' expectations
- difficulties dealing with failure
- attempting unrealistic goals and ending up frustrated.

Also consider if your child has:

- recently dropped in academic performance, or has dramatically fluctuating grades
- expressed general disinterest and lack of enthusiasm in areas that were previously interesting for him or her, such as extra-curricular activities
- begun to experience a change in general behaviour, such as level of appetite, amount of sleep, overall interest in relationships
- begun to experience physiological symptoms, such as stomachaches or headaches, that cannot be explained medically
- demonstrated other unusual behaviours, such as avoidance, aggression, or general lack of energy.

If your child is demonstrating any of the characteristics described above, ask yourself, "Are these behaviours barriers for my child?" and, "Do they prevent my child from experiencing success and happiness?"

Strategies for helping your child deal with depression

- *If your child exhibits symptoms of depression, contact your school counsellor and discuss your concerns.* Identify if your child is demonstrating similar behavioural changes in school or if his or her behaviour changes are environmentally specific (for instance, at home but not at school). If appropriate, involve your child in the discussion to explore possible reasons for how he or she is feeling.

- *Seek treatment and support from your physician and/or a psychologist experienced with children who are gifted if you and your school counsellor feel that the symptoms warrant further investigation.* It is important to work with people experienced in the area of giftedness so that intervention and treatment will consider the unique qualities of a child who is gifted or talented.

Frustration

Children who experience heightened emotions can often become frustrated at home, at the school and at the world around them. Some frustration may be inevitable if the child's mind may be far in advance of physical and learning skills. Children may get frustrated with inactivity or lack of progress. They may complain that school is too easy, too boring or too slow. They may feel frustrated because others consider them odd or do not appear to understand their ideas and insights.

These children are often eager to find quick solutions to difficult questions, and prone to select difficult but immediate alternatives to complex decisions. They can be intolerant of ambiguous or unresolved situations. They can be impatient with a lack of clear answers even where none really exist. When hasty resolutions to problems fail, they can become frustrated and angry.

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Frustration can lead to a sense of powerlessness, sometimes resulting in aggression, withdrawal or depression. Children may demonstrate their anger with deliberate underachievement, lack of interest, apathy and putting down the system.

There are ways parents can help children learn to control their feelings and deal with their emotions in appropriate and productive ways.

Strategies for helping your child deal with frustration

- *Teach your child how to recognize his or her own feelings of frustration.* Help your child in identifying and ways to deal with them, such as counting to 10.
- *Ensure that your expectations for how your child manages emotions are realistic for his or her age.* Expecting gifted children to behave at the same level as their intellectual performance may lead to great frustrations for both parent and child.
- *Guide your child toward finding his or her own solutions to problems.* If his or her efforts are unsuccessful, consider whether your intervention, perhaps by a meeting with a teacher or school administrator, might be helpful.
- *Make sure your child knows that it is okay to express his or her feelings in an appropriate environment.* Help him or her develop strategies for maintaining control in public.
- *Some children may benefit from anger management training.*

Introversion—It is perfectly normal

The main difference between extroverts and introverts is the source of their energy. Extroverts gain their energy from people and objects outside of themselves while introverts gain energy from within themselves. Extroverts like to be singled out while introverts do not. Extroverts have a tendency toward impulsivity while introverts are prone to reflection. One personality type is no better or more desirable than the other. However, our society tends to reward extroverted personalities. For example, teachers tend to wait less than one second for students to reply to their questions and tests of intelligence require students to complete tasks as quickly as possible.

Less than 25 percent of North Americans are introverts, but the percentage is much higher among the gifted population—up to 50 percent. If your child is introverted, do not try to make him or her into an extrovert. Introversion is perfectly normal and does not need to be 'cured.' However, knowing about these personality differences can help parents to better understand their children and their family dynamics. This knowledge can also help parents find ways to support their children as they are, rather than viewing introversion as a problem.

Of course, there may be some people who demonstrate both introverted and extroverted characteristics, depending on their comfort and interest level in a particular situation or context.

Strategies for supporting your child who is introverted

- *Give your child ample time to reflect on issues and situations.* They often do not feel comfortable responding on the spot; they need time to think about their response. Children who are introverted generally prefer to get advice and information to think about on their own, rather than talking things through.
- *Recognize the difference between aloneness and loneliness.* Loneliness may be a problem for some introverted children, and should be addressed. However, introverts need and enjoy time alone, and should not be forced to spend all their time with others.
- *Teach your child how to react appropriately in typical social situations.*
- *Recognize and appreciate your child's unique personality, interests and goals.*

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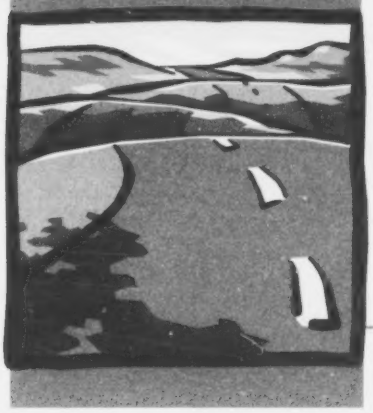
CHAPTER 8



The Road LESS Travelled

GIFTEDNESS AND LEARNING DISABILITIES, ATTENTION DISORDERS AND ASPERGER'S SYNDROME

Twice-exceptional

Some children who are gifted also have learning difficulties. The learning challenges that children who are gifted experience most commonly are learning disabilities, Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) and Asperger's Syndrome. These twice-exceptional children sometimes have difficulty reaching an academic level that matches their measured potential, and may go unidentified for several reasons.

Their exceptionalities often mask each other, resulting in neither being diagnosed. Other times, schools may stop looking for exceptional abilities once a learning disability has been identified, and therefore giftedness may go unidentified. In other instances, the child's giftedness may be identified but their disability may go undetected and the child may be labelled as an underachiever, unmotivated or uncooperative.

Children who are simultaneously gifted and have a disability can pose special challenges for parents and educators. As parents, you need to understand your child's dual exceptionalities and work with the school and community to ensure your child can learn to the best of his or her ability. Children, too, need to understand their dual exceptionalities, so they can use their strengths and abilities to compensate for their learning difficulties.

Learning disabilities

Students with learning disabilities have diverse, complex and interrelated difficulties, although they are often hidden or subtle. While there is great variability among students with learning disabilities, they are generally described as individuals of at least average intelligence who have difficulties processing information and who experience unexpected problems in some academic areas, or who have to exert unusual effort in order to achieve and maintain expected levels of performance.

These difficulties cannot be explained by other conditions or environmental influences. Students with learning disabilities exhibit an uneven pattern of strength and difficulties and thus experience strength and success in some areas while experiencing difficulties in other areas. Learning disabilities are lifelong. However, they may be affected by the demands of the environment, so their impact often varies at different ages and stages in life.

Like other children who are gifted, a child who also has a learning disability may:

- Have an intellectual level at or approaching the gifted range. However, some children who are twice-exceptional may not demonstrate their true cognitive abilities on standardized measures. It is important to consider assessment information beyond a standardized measure of intelligence when determining

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whether the child meets the criteria for a learning disability. In some cases academic achievement, in-class daily performance, family background, and observations may also be necessary in order to gather the information needed to determine that a child is gifted and has a learning disability.

- Have more interest and ability in pursuing broad, thematic topics than in remembering and working with details. Linda Silverman describes this tendency as "the harder the task, the better they do; it's the easy work they can't master."
- Be more of an intuitive "dreamer" than a practically oriented thinker. Creativity or problem-solving abilities may be exhibited in a specific area of interest.
- Prefer fact-based information such as facts, dates and formulas.
- Do well in areas requiring the ability to visualize; e.g., mathematics (especially geometry), art.
- Have a great interest in learning when topics are of interest or are meaningful to them.

Like children of average ability with learning disabilities, a child who is gifted and has a learning disability may:

- Have an uneven academic profile. For example, they may have strengths in mathematics or content areas and weaknesses in the language arts areas.
- Have written language difficulties. This could include poor handwriting, poor mechanics and difficulty in organizing content.
- Need remedial help with some skills. They will often respond better to teaching in context than to isolated skill building.
- Have difficulty organizing time and materials. They often forget homework or need extra time to complete it.
- Need more time to process language and to gather responses than would be expected of someone with high intellectual capabilities.
- Lack some social skills and common-sense decision-making ability.
- Have unusual sensitivity to light, sound and touch.
- Be less successful than expected when dealing with input from multiple sources or with tasks that require the integration of multiple skills.
- Be unclear or confused about their abilities. They may lack awareness and understanding of their own learning strengths and needs.
- Develop behaviours that hide their disability. This could include strategies such as avoidance, passivity or overcompensation.
- Experience underlying anxiety. They may worry unnecessarily about school-related tasks.
- Perceive themselves to be incapable of learning. They may generalize their disability to all areas of school.
- Be overly critical of themselves. They may have difficulty accepting compliments or constructive criticism.
- Experience conflict between their sense of independence in thinking and possible dependence on supports related to their disability.

In spite of their ability to perform in the superior or gifted range on individual intelligence tests, their brains sometimes appear to function differently and less efficiently than other students of similar intellectual ability.

Strategies for supporting your child who is gifted and has a learning disability

- *Learn as much as you can about your child's exceptionalities.* Organizations such as the Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta can provide information and assistance. Web sites can also be a good starting point.
- *Explore programming options.* Be involved with the school in designing an IPP and encourage your child to participate. IPPs for children with dual exceptionalities should focus on using strengths to accommodate difficulties. For example, many children benefit from instruction that emphasizes visual thinking.

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- *Participate in the IPP process.* Work with school staff to ensure that the IPP addresses both enrichment in the area that your child is gifted and/or talented, and strategies and accommodations in their areas of challenge.
- *Consider how your children's challenges may be affecting their performance.* Your child may even experience difficulties in areas where they should be excelling. Identify appropriate strategies and accommodations so that your children can reach their potential. For instance, a child who is gifted in mathematics may have a disability that affects his or her ability to complete simple calculations, resulting in below-average performance in an area where they should excel.
- *Do not hesitate to request the involvement of personnel beyond the classroom teacher.* The principal, school counsellor and district psychologist may be resources for parents and teachers on such matters. The most helpful person in your school may vary, so get to know each of them. Parents sometimes go immediately to outside consultants, but the search for assistance should start within the school.
- *Help your child develop self-advocacy skills.* Self-advocacy depends upon the development of self-monitoring skills, a realistic and accurate understanding of strengths and challenges, and appropriate interaction with teachers. Encourage independent thinking by using language that encourages children to problem solve. When appropriate, ask children questions such as "What do you need to do?", rather than telling them what to do.
- *Ensure that you are working with the school team.* Create consistency by reinforcing whatever strategies and approaches are working successfully at school.
- *Set priorities.* When necessary, share these priorities with your child's teachers. Is having an A average worth four or five hours of homework every night and/or giving up extra-curricular activities? It is important to set realistic goals and demands for both yourself and your child. How much stress can everyone tolerate? It is important to spend time together in family and recreational activities.
- *Teach your child strategies to keep track of belongings and activities.* Remembering assignments, getting books and homework between school and home, and generally holding one's life together, are major obstacles for many children who are gifted and have learning difficulties. They need direct instruction and specific strategies to develop these skills. For example, many children benefit using colour coding to organize their school materials. Try identifying subjects in notebooks by different coloured sections or matching coloured tape on closet shelves to the items that should be stored there. In the beginning, adult monitoring may be needed, but eventually these patterns will become routine. Another idea is to have your child carry a small notebook or day planner for recording assignments. If needed, teachers and parents can initial pages to signal that they have checked for accuracy and completeness.
- *Set aside time each night to help your child organize and plan his or her schedule.* Children who are gifted and have learning difficulties often have problems getting tasks completed on time and managing their schedule to allow for recreation as well as study. To avoid wasted time and long homework sessions, you may want to help your child write out a complete daily schedule each evening before going to bed. Building in time for classes, studying and recreation helps the child ensure that these activities occur with predictability and balance.
- *Set up routines for daily activities.* Making sure daily activities occur at the same time and in the same way every day is another way to provide the structure needed by the disorganized child. For example, decide that homework should *always* be placed by the front door in the evening so that the frantic morning search can be avoided. Or that

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clothes for the next day should *always* be selected before going to bed so that matching socks are ready for 7 A.M. As parents, your role is to set up the structure, monitor it and reinforce it, until it becomes a routine that children can follow on their own.

- *Look for remedial help from a variety of sources.* If your child falls behind academically, look for alternatives. Peer tutors may be available in the school. Out-of-school volunteers or private tutors may be other sources of assistance. Look for a tutor who understands and responds to your child's particular needs, and who emphasizes teaching basic skills within a meaningful context.
- *Seek out community enrichment activities.* Look for out-of-school programs that support your child's strengths. Explore options available through local museums, libraries, universities and summer recreation programs. This can also be a good way to teach your child social skills that will help him or her both in and out of school.
- *Support and encourage the use of assistive technology.* As adults, many of us freely use devices such as word processors, spell checks and calculators to complete our daily tasks. When used appropriately, these devices can be beneficial to students who are gifted and have learning difficulties. Children should be taught how to use these technologies at an early age. The rapid movement toward including technology in the classroom makes this goal more feasible with every passing year.

Attention Disorders

Children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) range from those who daydream and are chronically inattentive (Primarily Inattentive type), to children who are hyperactive and impulsive (Primarily Hyperactive/Impulsive type), to children who demonstrate both inattention and hyperactivity (Combined type). AD/HD is generally characterized by chronic and pervasive difficulty in more than one environment.

Children with AD/HD–Primarily Inattentive type may:

- be easily distracted and unable to pay attention for reasonable periods of time
- have difficulty listening, following directions, and completing tasks or chores
- daydream a lot
- demonstrate underdeveloped social skills affecting the way they interact with others
- seem unaware of the risks or consequences of their actions and don't appear to learn from consequences
- either pay little or no attention to details *and* make careless mistakes, or overfocus on irrelevant details
- appear disorganized and forgetful; lose things; lack the organizational skills to get homework or notes to and from home and school.

Children with AD/HD–Primarily Hyperactive/Impulsive type may:

- move about constantly; seem to be always on the go
- talk and interrupt excessively
- have difficulty sharing or waiting their turn
- fidget and squirm
- act without thinking.

Children with AD/HD–Combined type demonstrate characteristics from both of the above categories.

While it is possible for a child to have AD/HD and to be gifted at the same time, many children who are gifted may exhibit characteristics similar to those of children with AD/HD and not have AD/HD. For example, children who are gifted may demonstrate high energy levels or constant internal preoccupation with their thoughts and ideas. These children may benefit from enrichment and independent study within a special interest area to help them constructively channel their energy. However, if your child exhibits behaviours outlined above that consistently interfere with his or her academic, emotional or social success, it may be worthwhile to investigate the possibility of AD/HD with a pediatrician or psychologist who is knowledgeable about giftedness and AD/HD.

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If your child receives a medical diagnosis of AD/HD, they may benefit from a variety and combination of interventions, such as strategy instruction, counselling, cognitive behaviour therapy, and/or drug therapy.

Accommodating children's learning styles and teaching them techniques to compensate for their attentional issues is an important component of any intervention and will help children with AD/HD gain self-awareness and self-confidence as a learner.

Strategies for supporting children who are gifted and experience attention difficulties

- *Provide a purpose for listening before giving verbal information.* "Listen carefully, I'm going to tell you the three things we need to do before we can go to soccer."
- *Ask children to paraphrase information in their own words.* This ensures that they have received and understood the whole message.
- *Establish clear expectations for behaviour at home and in the community.* Discuss expectations for behaviour in specific situations, such as when the parent is on the phone. Review behavioural expectations for specific settings, such as restaurants and grocery stores, before going on outings.
- *Provide frequent, positive feedback regarding appropriate behaviour.* Often children are noticed when they are noisy or disruptive, but are not reinforced for those times when they are quiet, attentive, or acting appropriately. Rather than making a vague statement such as "You were being good" provide more tangible feedback such as "I like the way you picked up your toys without being told." Clearly label what is positive about the child's behaviour to encourage more of this behaviour in the future.
- *Give one task at a time.* As one task is completed, instructions can be given for the next task.
- *Seek any necessary medical intervention early, and maintain it as long as needed.* If medication is part of the treatment plan, continuous monitoring by a physician is necessary to ensure that the proper dosage and desired results are achieved.
- *Be patient—change takes time.* Recognize that occasional errors, excuses and backsliding are inevitable. Help your child to make steady progress through consistent, supportive reminders, but also recognize the benefit of being flexible.
- *Learn about AD/HD.* Consider joining an organization focusing on attentional issues so that you can discuss the issues with those who know.

Asperger's Syndrome

Another disorder that may co-exist with giftedness is Asperger's Syndrome (AS). Children with Asperger's Syndrome often demonstrate many of the characteristics associated with Autism Spectrum Disorders but have average or above-average cognitive abilities. The children are often labelled as "socially awkward," "eccentric" or "odd." The characteristics of Asperger's Syndrome will often change as an individual matures and develops skills.

Some children with Asperger's Syndrome may have several characteristics that overlap with typical characteristics of giftedness. These could include:

- verbal fluency
- fascination with letters or numbers and enjoyment of memorizing factual information at an early age
- demonstrating an absorbing interest in a specialized topic and acquiring extraordinary amounts of factual information about it
- hypersensitivity to sensory stimuli

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- uneven or asynchronous development
- persistence with work regardless of distractions or problems.

However, compared to children who are gifted but do not have Asperger's, children with this dual exceptionality may:

- have a very low tolerance for change
- have an overly rigid interpretation of rules; appear "black and white" in their thinking
- have pedantic speech or peculiar speech patterns
- desire relationships but have difficulty forming or maintaining friendships
- lack insight and awareness regarding the feelings, needs and interests of other people
- demonstrate a bizarre sense of humour
- be clumsy
- demonstrate emotional reactions that appear inappropriate to the context or event.

These children are at risk for social isolation and rejection by peers.

Asperger's Syndrome is diagnosed through a comprehensive assessment done by an experienced interdisciplinary team. This team could include developmental pediatricians, psychologists and/or psychiatrists. Parents should be involved in the assessment since developmental history is important to confirming or ruling out the diagnosis. The other important element of the assessment is insight into the motivation behind certain behaviours.

The two conditions, giftedness and Asperger's Syndrome, can mask one another, making identification of either more difficult, particularly when professionals are generally trained in either giftedness or Autism Spectrum Disorders, but rarely in both.

Strategies for supporting your child who is gifted and has Asperger's Syndrome

- *Learn as much as you can about your child's exceptionalities.* Organization such as the Autism Society of Alberta can provide information, assistance and networking opportunities. Web sites can also be a good starting point—for example, www.tonyattwood.com.au contains research and resources related to Asperger's Syndrome and giftedness.
- *Respect your child's individual differences.* There are a wide range of acceptable behaviours; not every child should have to display all of these behaviours, all of the time.
- *Recognize and build on your child's strengths.* It is important to see past your child's disorder and recognize the strengths that are undoubtedly there. This may involve identifying some seemingly idiosyncratic skills and unusual interests that can be broadened and shaped into useful knowledge. Special interests often provide the hook that can be used to expand these children's knowledge and skills into broader areas.
- *Find mentors for your child.* These children need direct and individualized support and coaching in their area of special interest. A successful mentorship can contribute greatly to the learning and social development of an individual with Asperger's Syndrome.
- *Use visual supports to manage day-to-day routines and social demands.* As much as possible, organize home life so daily activities occur at similar times and in similar ways in order to provide the structure these children need. Reinforce these routines with visual tools such as calendars and day timers so that children are better able to understand "what will happen next" or what they need to do.

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- *Use a neutral tone when giving your child instructions.* Try not to show irritation when talking with these children. For some individuals with Asperger's Syndrome, anger may be the most accessible and easily understood emotion they can evoke in others. This restriction on available emotional sensation may lead them to develop a habit of "pushing people's buttons," leading to a negative interaction pattern.
- *Keep directions or corrections short.* Avoid lengthier explanations that increase the chance that the child will distort the meaning of the message.
- *Modify the sensory environment.* Extreme sensitivity to some kinds of sensory stimuli is common among children with Asperger's Syndrome. Respect these sensitivities and help your child develop coping strategies. Look for low tech solutions such as silicone earplugs to block out noise. Experiment with techniques such as hand massages to help your child calm down.
- *Teach social perception and social skills.* Use concrete visual approaches to model and teach specific social skills. Try practising in a mirror or developing comic strip conversations to develop social understanding. Check Web sites for social stories that can help children with Asperger's Syndrome manage regular and new routines.
- *Take an active role in supporting social relationships.* Look for ways to reduce your child's social differences. Model appropriate behaviour and provide opportunities for positive interactions with peers.
- *Protect your child from bullying and teasing.* Educate siblings and other family members about Asperger's Syndrome. If teasing is a problem at school, talk to teaching staff about proactive strategies for educating and building positive relationships with classmates. This might include social skills training or character education. Deciding to share information with peers is a group decision involving your child, you as a parent, and the teaching staff.
- *Work collaboratively with others.* Keep in close contact with teachers and other school staff and work with them to find solutions that are the best for your child. If you need additional support, there are a variety of resources in the community. Network with other parents of children who are gifted and have Asperger's Syndrome.

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The Road Ahead

CAREER PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Challenges of career development*

The need for early opportunities for career planning, especially for girls, is strongly supported in the research literature on gifted education. There are a number of issues that may make career development challenging for students who are gifted. These could include the following.

- *Multipotentiality*
  Many young people who are gifted have multiple passions or talents, and it can be difficult to identify and/or decide on a career path that will accommodate these diverse interests.

- *Personal investment*
  The types of careers that many individuals who are gifted tend to aspire to often require extensive post-secondary training. Such education often involves great personal, social and financial costs.

- *Geographical and socio-economic mobility*
  For many young people who are gifted, particularly those from rural areas, pursuing the occupations they are interested in means having to leave their home communities. This can create conflicted feelings.

- *Expectations of others*
  The career expectations of parents, teachers and peers can exert tremendous pressure on young people who are gifted.

- *Innovativeness*
  Many new career options are the direct result of the ingenuity of individuals who are gifted. For example, the field of bio-mechanical engineering did not exist until someone combined interests in biology, mechanics and engineering. Technological breakthroughs are constantly making new career paths possible. If necessary, individuals who are gifted need to be prepared to "invent" their own careers. However, combining several disciplines into one career path requires greater investment than focusing on a single discipline.

Career development components

Dr. Michael Pyryt, of the Centre for Gifted Education at the University of Calgary, proposes a number of essential career development components for students who are gifted. They include the following.

* Pyryt, M. "Career Education for the Gifted: Complexities and Recommendations" in *The Alberta Counsellor*, Volume 24, November 1, Spring 1998. pp. 13–17.

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- *Self-awareness and self-concept development*
  Individuals who are gifted can make thoughtful career choices by developing awareness of their personal aptitudes and interests. Tools for enhancing self-awareness include standardized personality inventories, such as Holland's Vocational Preference Inventory, or informed questionnaires, such as the Career Issues Survey.

- *Overcoming sex-role stereotypes*
  It is important that young people who are gifted, particularly young women, develop positive expectations for success in their future career path. There are a number of techniques for encouraging girls to broaden their thinking about career options, such as providing mentors, and same-sex career days for young women.

- *Creative problem solving*
  Training young people in creative problem solving can build their capacity for dealing with career-related challenges such as the need for a high degree of personal investment and geographic mobility. One popular creative problem-solving model consists of the following stages:
  – fact finding
  – problem finding
  – idea finding
  – solution finding, and
  – acceptance finding.

- *Interpersonal effectiveness*
  An effective style of communicating can help individuals who are gifted handle the many social and professional situations they will face in their careers. They need to develop assertiveness, flexibility, empathy, and awareness of their own feelings.

- *Time and stress management*
  These skills can help individuals who are gifted cope with challenges of personal investment, geographic mobility and the expectations of others. Young people need to learn a variety of strategies so they can choose what works best for them.

- *Content acceleration*
  Allowing young people who are gifted to accelerate their education is one way to reduce the heavy time and financial commitments required to pursue many professions. Potential opportunities for acceleration include early entrance to university, part-time university course work, distance education, Advanced Placement, and acceleration in a specific subject area or at a specific grade level.

These essential components of career development can help young people who are gifted to overcome some of the challenges that they may face. In addition, young people need to develop inspiration, courage and perseverance to begin making the many decisions involved in career planning.

The High Five Messages of Career Development*

We live in changing, challenging and uncertain times. To help guide your child as he or she builds a career, there are five important messages you can convey. These messages are called the High Five Messages of Career Development.

Follow your heart
Let your dreams shape your goals so that you go after what you really want.

Change is constant
Adaptability is one of the most important skills you will carry throughout your journey.

* The High Five Messages of Career Development were developed by a number of Canadian career development specialists, and validated by Helen Hackett, John McCormick, Aryeh Gitterman, Michele Tocher, Pat Butter, Donna Davidson and Tracy Lamb.

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Team up with others
Your friends, family and teachers can be valuable resources in helping you achieve your goals.

Focus on the journey
Life is not a destination; it is an exciting trip with many directions and goals that may change.

Learning is ongoing
The end of school does not mean the end of learning. Opportunities to learn are all around—take advantage of them.

Understanding and following these key career messages can help children develop:

- resiliency
- the courage to welcome change as an opportunity to learn
- the ability to adapt to various situations
- the willingness and capacity to share problems and solutions with others.

Follow your heart: exploring interests and setting goals

Many of the interests and abilities that your child possesses will be manifested in activities by the end of elementary school. Keeping track of children's changing interests, goals and dreams is an important early step in career planning. It may be a good idea to keep a written record of your child's interests and even samples of written work or art pieces for future reflection. Once in junior or senior high school, encourage your child to maintain this kind of record for him or herself.

Some children who are gifted show an early passion for a particular occupation. These children can be nurtured and supported as they strive for their chosen career. However, it is important to recognize that other children will show an interest in and potential for a number of career options. These individuals, who are equally talented in several areas (also known as having multipotentiality), may experience "overchoice" syndrome or an inability to make a decision.

In addition to developing their unique abilities and talents, children who are gifted also need to be encouraged to develop decision-making skills, and to learn that life is sometimes about finding a middle ground. Setting realistic and meaningful goals is an important part of the career development process. By encouraging your child to set attainable goals, you can help him or her to create a sense of purpose and personal success. Setting goals for post-secondary education and careers also gives children and teens an opportunity to exercise existing skills and talents while identifying and building new ones.

Strategies for exploring interests and setting goals

- *Encourage your child to recognize his or her values.* Discuss questions such as:
  - How do you spend your time?
  - How do you spend your money?
  - What do you get excited about?
  - What frustrates you?
  - Who do you want to be like? Why?

- *Let your child know that you want to hear about his or her dreams.* Respect his or her ideas and passions, and above all LISTEN. Resist the temptation to tell your child what to do, pass judgement, or focus on dreams you had when you were that age.

- *Challenge your teen to ask "What if?"* Discuss a fantasy situation, such as the following.
  - What would you do if you received a million dollar inheritance or award?
  - How would your dreams and goals change if you had this million dollars?
  - What is stopping you from going after your million dollar dreams today?

  You can gain insight into your child's dreams, goals and values by reading between the lines of his or her answers.

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- *Encourage your child to read biographies.* Consider titles such as *Images of Greatness* by David Melton or *Kidstories: Biographies of 20 Young People You'd Like to Know* by Jim Delisle. These books give children an opportunity to learn how different people develop their gifts and talents.

- *Encourage your child to identify and record goals.* Use a worksheet such as **Activity: Goal-setting** (pp. 71–72), or work through the steps with your child.

- *Encourage your teen to develop a personal career portfolio.* There will be opportunities in Grades 7–9 Health and Life Skills and Senior High Career and Life Management (CALM) programs to begin this process.

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Activity: Goal-setting

1. Create a wish list. Make a list of everything you want in life.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

2. Focus
Circle the five most important things from your wish list, then choose one wish to focus on.

3. Refine
Turn your wish into a goal by identifying the first major step toward fulfilling that wish. For example:
- *My wish is to find a cure for cancer.*
- *My goal is to be accepted into the University of Alberta science program.*

Break this goal down into manageable steps or short-term goals. For example:

1. *I will score 90+ percent in all subject areas this year.*
2. _____
3. _____

4. The best goals are **SMART**:
- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**chievable
- **R**ealistic
- **T**ime-based.

My goal is to _____.

5. Use positive self-talk
If you have a goal that you don't think you can achieve, then you need to give yourself a pep talk. Some positive statements you could use include the following.

"I will achieve my chosen career."
"I am reaching my goals."
"I can do this!"

_____
_____
_____

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Activity: Goal-setting – continued

6. Make an action plan

For example:

Define your hurdles.	• I put off doing my math assignments.
Write down the steps you will take to get around the hurdles.	• I will not open my e-mail until I have completed the day's math assignment.

Your action plan:

Define your hurdles.	• • •
Write down the steps you will take to get around the hurdles.	• • •

7. **Visualize** yourself achieving this goal and enjoying its rewards.

"If we did what we are capable of doing, we would astound ourselves."

– Thomas Edison

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Change is constant: cultivating adaptability

The career question of the future will not be "What *do* you do?" but "What *can* you do?" To build successful and fulfilling careers, teens need a new model of career development that emphasizes adaptable skills and attitudes, and the ability to deal with change. Being ready to handle constant change involves the following things:

Keeping options open
If children or teens become too attached too early to a specific long-term career goal, they take the chance that the occupation they have in mind may disappear or change radically before they "get there." Encourage your child to set short-term goals that he or she can accomplish within a certain period of time while keeping longer-term options open.

Planning to be flexible and adaptive
A commonly-held work ethic is based on the notion that we must pick one thing and stick to it. However, most Canadians now change their occupations an average of four to six times in their lifetimes, and that number is likely to increase. Children and teens need to learn that security does not come from doing the same thing for a long time, but from being flexible enough to adapt to change.

Developing self-knowledge
Part of being adaptable means understanding your own skills and where they can take you. Individuals who are trying to make career choices often take tests to measure intelligence, interests, aptitudes, skills, values and suitability for particular occupations. However, these kinds of tests only measure the various aspects of a person or an occupation at a single moment in time. Young people need to realize that the best way to measure themselves is to *know* themselves.

Team up with others: the role of family, school and community

Parents have an important role in the career planning of their children. Even before children begin school, parents start them off on a career journey through activities such as vacations, visiting family members and developing interests in the community. It is no surprise then that a national survey shows that half of teens turn to their parents for help in making decisions about careers, school, money and right versus wrong.

However, the same survey reveals that 55 percent of teens surveyed feel they are misunderstood by their parents. This research suggests that children may want, need, and will probably accept parents' help and advice, if it can be framed in a way that shows children that their parents do understand what matters to them. The following questions may help you to understand your child's dreams, abilities and possible career options, as well as your own role in your child's career planning. You may want to record answers in a journal and return to these questions a number of times throughout your child's school years.

- What activities does my child enjoy most and what skills do these activities require?
- What careers would utilize these skills?
- Do I know anyone in that career whom I could ask to talk to my child?
- What careers have I often thought would be of interest to my child? Why? What skills are required for these careers that I see my child demonstrating?
- Does my child's teacher have any suggestions for careers suited to my child's skills and abilities?
- What are my hopes and dreams for my child?

Career planning is an ongoing and cooperative process. The aspirations that children develop from early experiences will grow and change as a result of activities, interactions and opportunities at school. A range of possible

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options may be imagined and discussed, from astronaut to veterinarian to sports star. Talk to your child's teachers and other school staff about your child's career goals, and opportunities that exist in the school and community.

Junior and senior high school are good times to begin exploring career options through activities such as work experience, volunteering and extra-curricular activities. Different work environments provide your teen with opportunities to develop new skills and find out more about possible career paths. These work experiences help teens to set new directions and take action. As part of the work force, your teen will also have more opportunity to learn about trends and projections for the future of certain careers.

To help you and your child record career-related interests, experiences and plans, see Alberta Learning's *Career Planner*. This folder helps students organize information about:

- education
- personal strengths and assets
- community volunteer involvement
- career planning activities, and
- career goals.

There are two versions of the *Career Planner*—one for junior high school and one for senior high school. Both planners can be downloaded at no cost from the Alberta Learning Web site at www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/curriculum/other.asp.

Strategies for teaming with others

- *Help teachers learn about your child's career interests so they can consider this in planning for programming.* Encourage your child to discuss the *Career Planner* with his or her teachers.
- *Look for opportunities in the community.* Consider what work or volunteer opportunities could give your child some experience with careers of interest.
- *Investigate whether there is a job-shadowing or work experience program at your child's school.* Encourage your child to participate.
- *Find out how you and your child can be involved in career events.* Often schools or local post-secondary institutions organize annual events.
- *Encourage your child to maintain relationships with teachers or mentors.* These individuals could be potential references for scholarship or job applications.
- *Help your child to make a list of careers he or she might be interested in.* Learn as much as possible about these prospective careers through visits to work sites, interviews with people in the field, and visits to college and university classes.

Focus on the journey

Goal setting is an important part of career development, but children and teens need to understand that goals change and evolve. Career development is a lifelong process. Your child will need to review and update his or her goals and plans regularly, perhaps at the end of each school year. Your child's interests may change, he or she may develop or uncover new skills, eligibility requirements for post-secondary programs may change, or new senior high school courses may be offered. Every year, encourage your teen to reflect on his or her achievements and to define areas to maintain, to improve upon and to explore. Help your child to approach life as a journey, full of ongoing learning and exciting new opportunities.

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Part of seeing life as a journey means recognizing that this journey involves much more than just a job. In the 21st century, we have broadened our understanding of career to include everything that an individual does over the course of a lifetime. In addition to paid employment, this can include hobbies, interests, leisure activities, part-time jobs, volunteer activities, sports and schooling. Children who are gifted have the opportunity to use their talents in a variety of fulfilling ways, not only through paid employment. For example, if your child is equally talented in writing, music and science, he or she may combine these abilities by becoming a scientist who also enjoys poetry and playing the piano, or a writer who specializes in scientific investigations but also reports on musical events, or a musician who writes about music theory and keeps abreast of scientific findings.

Strategies for focusing on the journey

- *Let your child know that career choice and development is a continuous process.* There will be many changes along the way.
- *Help your child to understand that talents can be expressed in a variety of ways.* A job is only one aspect of life—hobbies, volunteer work and social interactions may provide additional opportunities to use gifts and talents.
- *Encourage your teen to keep tabs on the future.* Follow the news on TV and read the business and career sections of the newspaper. Discuss trends and issues with your child.

Learning is ongoing: Planning for post-secondary studies

For many children who are gifted, post-secondary studies provides a forum to further explore and develop their potential. While post-secondary education provides specific training for careers, it also teaches how to focus effort and helps students develop the thinking skills needed to be successful in the work force and in life. As a result, post-secondary education gives individuals more job opportunities, higher incomes, better quality of life and increased mobility in the global market.

It is important that you and your child become familiar early on with the range of post-secondary options available. When your child is in junior high, begin exploring institutions and programs that your child may be interested in and investigating their admission requirements. To help you and your child select courses and plan a senior high school diploma that will create as many options as possible for post-secondary education, Alberta Learning has developed a resource called *A Credit to Yourself.* This resource that can be downloaded at no cost from www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/curriculum/other.asp.

Strategies for planning for post-secondary studies

- *Discuss post-secondary options and programs with your child.* Consult with teachers and school counsellors.
- *Attend open houses of various post-secondary institutions.* Visit Web sites and send for information on programs that might fit your child's needs.

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- *Keep track of information.* Use the **Activity: Charting Options for Post-secondary Education** worksheet (on p. 77) to record information as you and your teen investigate various options for post-secondary education.

Financing post-secondary education

In addition to whatever family savings you have available, there are many sources of funding for post-secondary education, including scholarships, grants and bursaries; federal, provincial and territorial loans; and bank loans. The key is to start investigating these sources of funding and planning a financial strategy as soon as possible. For more information about scholarships, grants, bursaries and loans, talk to your school guidance counsellor or visit the Alberta Learning Information Service Web site at www.alis.gov.ab.ca/learning/fa/main.asp.

Scholarships
The government, individual school boards, schools, post-secondary institutions, businesses and community organizations all offer scholarships. Most of these scholarships are awarded based on academic achievement, sometimes in combination with other factors such as community service. For example, in Alberta, students can earn a maximum of $2,500 toward their post-secondary education through Alexander Rutherford Scholarships. These scholarships are awarded to students when they enroll in post-secondary institutions and have earned an 80% average in five senior high school courses (one of which must be a language arts course) at each grade level. Students typically apply for the Alexander Rutherford Scholarship in the spring of their Grade 12 year, and the award is paid during the first semester of post-secondary studies.

Grants and bursaries
In addition to scholarships, the provincial and federal governments give grants and bursaries such as the following:

- Maintenance Grants – for students with special circumstances.
- Canada Study Grants – for students with special needs.
- Canadian Millennium Bursary – up to $3,000 per year for undergraduate students with high financial need.
- Alberta Opportunity Bursaries – for first or second year students.

Unlike loans, grants and bursaries do not need to be repaid upon graduation. Most grants and bursaries are awarded to students based on financial or other disadvantages.

Family contributions
When your child is in junior high school, begin talking to him or her about the need to plan and save for post-secondary education. As a family, discuss the contributions you will be able to make through a Registered Education Savings Plan or other sources, as well as your child's role and responsibility in saving for his or her education.

Your child may be able to contribute by making and saving money from a summer or part-time job. Help your teen to look for jobs that will expose him or her to different types of work or to a particular field of interest. Your teen may also be able to contribute money saved from allowances, birthdays, investments or other sources.

Government sponsored student loans
Your child may be eligible to receive student loans sponsored by the provincial and federal governments. These loans are available to full-time students with demonstrated financial need who are attending a certified post-secondary institution. Government loans are interest- and payment-free until the student leaves school.

Bank loans
Loans issued directly from a bank or other financial institution may be a suitable alternative if your child does not qualify for a government sponsored student loan.

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Activity: Charting Options for Post-secondary Education

As you research different careers, keep track of post-secondary institutions and programs that would help you succeed in each career, as well as the entrance requirements for each program. Also, record any information about each career's potential for the future.

Type of Career	Type and Name of Institution	Entrance Requirements	Potential for the Future

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CHAPTER 10

The Journey Continues

RESEARCHING NEW QUESTIONS

The value of information

This handbook gives you some of the information you need to help you support your child who is gifted, but this is just a starting point. The more information you have about your child's learning needs, programs and issues, the more able you will be to positively impact your child's future. The information you acquire through further research could help you understand, support, guide and mentor your child with greater confidence and skill. Researching educational issues could provide you with valuable information to consider in making future decisions about your child's education.

Choosing issues to research

During your child's school career, you may seek information on a diversity of topics, from developmental issues to instructional strategies. Sometimes figuring out what question to ask is a difficult task. Try brainstorming to create a list of questions. Here is a sampling of the types of questions that parents of children who are gifted might research:

- How could my child benefit from computer technology?
- What are some ways to support my child's spelling skills?
- What should I do if my child is underachieving?
- How can I help my child plan for a career?

Narrowing down your question

Pare your list down to the most important questions and try to specify exactly what you need to know. For example, if you decide to research more about Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD), your questions might focus on current medical research and educational literature. Think about the kind of information you need: are you looking for screening information? Do you want to know how AD/HD affects learning and behaviour? What are the controversial issues? Are some treatments more credible than others? What kinds of things can you do at home? What can you expect the school to do? What are the long-term educational and health implications? Write down whatever questions you have about the issue.

Finding information

- *People* can be excellent resources to direct and focus your inquiries. People to consider include staff from schools, community agencies, government institutions and libraries.

- *Libraries* should be one of your first destinations when you start your research. Often just phoning the reference desk at your local library will provide you with enough information to focus your research. In addition to the local public library, there are libraries in universities, colleges and

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government departments. Print materials found in a library are usually highly credible because these resources have been selected by subject librarians in specific areas, such as government, law, arts, language and literature, or fiction. As well, librarians may be able to recommend reliable sources elsewhere, such as good sites to visit on the Internet.

- *Print resources* can provide a variety of information. Newspapers are an accessible and current source for general information. Magazines and periodicals are other sources of information that is current but more specialized than newspaper information. Your local library's copy of the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* or the *Canadian Periodical Index* will provide the names of publications in your subject area. Books, though often less current than periodicals, cover topics in greater detail. Other printed material—such as pamphlets, annual reports and newsletters from relevant organizations—can provide information of a general nature that may help to direct your inquiry.

- The *Internet* has a huge amount of information about almost every topic imaginable. The cautionary note to any user of the Internet is that you must check the reliability of the source. Online resources are often linked through a library's home page to other virtual online resources; going from the library's Web site out into the Internet can save time and help ensure reliability.

- *Television, film and audiocassettes* provide information on both general and specific topics and issues.

Checking reliability of sources

You can use the 5Ws + H to evaluate the source of information. Consider the following questions.

- *Who is the author?* Where does the author work? At a recognized institution or government? Have other people mentioned the author? For Web sites, is the author or organization clearly stated?

- *What is the purpose of the source?* Who is the audience? Is the information factual or propaganda—does the author use facts or emotions to get his or her point across?

- *When was the material created?* For print material, check the publication date and whether this is first edition or a revision of the material. For a Web site, check whether links still work and look at the last time the site was updated. Older material may present information and statistics that are out-of-date.

- *Where was the source published or created?* Is the publisher or journal reputable? Is the journal reviewed? Books or periodicals that are self-published may have a hidden agenda. For Web sites, certain domain names may indicate a greater reliability. For example, the ending ".edu" signifies an American university and ".gov" is reserved for the Canadian government, both of which are reliable sources.

- *How can I tell if the source is accurate?* Double-check your sources by comparing the facts and ideas presented in them to those presented in other sources. Can you find the same information in three other sources? Consider whether the source might be biased or uninformed. Authors or Web sites might be speaking about something that is beyond their level of expertise. They may have used unreliable sources in the first place and passed this information on to you. Or they may have hidden agendas; for example, they may be trying to sell you a product. If the material is a book, see if you can find a review of the book to determine how others have assessed it.

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- *Why should I use this source?* You may be able to get the information quicker from another source. If you can not verify the source, you might want to leave it and search for a piece by a known author.

Comparing sources

The more information you find, the better your understanding of the issue will be. When you use only one source of information, you can not be sure that it is current, accurate or complete. Some information presented as fact may be unsupported opinion. As a general guideline, try to gather information from at least three sources.

When you feel you have enough information, review your notes. Reread the print material you found. You may note that some of the information is contradictory or does not support what you have learned. With controversial issues, where people have taken sides, you have to decide on the reliability of the sources supporting each side.

Accessing library resources

The reference librarian at your local library can get you started on using library resources, and show you which database or periodical index to use to continue researching on your own. Periodical indexes are a source of author, title and abstract information for articles published in magazines, newspapers and other periodicals. The broadest index of popular consumer magazines is called the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*. To access more specialized information, you could use the indexes that are organized according to subject areas: for example, the *Education Index*, *Index Medicus*, *Psychological Abstracts*, *Social Science and Humanities Index* or *Applied Science and Technology Index*.

To find the articles you want to read, make a note of the information listed in the index:

- periodical title, volume number, issue date
- author's name
- title of article
- page numbers of article.

You will then need to locate the specific periodical within the library.

With the Internet, many libraries have connected their databases together into a virtual library where you can locate information outside the four walls of the library. From virtual online resources, you may access encyclopedias and dictionaries, Canadian sources like *Electric Library Canada Plus*, and magazine or newspaper articles. Through the *Canadian Periodical Index*, you can access specialized newsletters, the Health Reference Centre, the General Reference Centre, CPI.Q (a list of Canadian and international journals, magazines and other reference material), and the Business Index. To find recent articles about "self-advocacy skills," for example, type the phrase into a number of the search areas in the periodical index.

The NEOS Library Consortium is a collaboration of libraries across Alberta. NEOS has a Web site at www.neoslibraries.ca that allows you to access collections from government departments, college and university libraries and hospital libraries. This powerful Web site offers Albertans access to a wide range of materials, from conference proceedings to government documents. To get a NEOS card, contact one of the libraries listed on the Web site.

Using the Internet

Internet services that you should consider using for your research include the World Wide Web, chat rooms, live events using video and audio, and e-mail to write to your contacts, mailing lists, newsgroups and Web forums.

A search engine is an index of information on the Internet. Search engines conduct searches using key words. The best way to choose the word or words to use is to select the rarest word in your phrase. For example, instead of typing "choosing a tutor," you would simply use "tutor" for your search. If you have the choice,

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specify the range of dates you expect the material to have been produced. This will ensure you get more current research.

The following is a list of commonly-used search engines.
www.google.com
www.hotbot.com
www.altavista.com
www.excite.com
www.beaucoup.com
www.yahoo.com
www.journalismnet.com
www.dogpile.com (presents information taken from a number of search engines).

Since different search engines access different areas of the Web, learn how to use three or four different ones. Whenever you use a search engine, read its tips for advanced research so that you will know how to limit the search on the engine you are using.

You may also wish to access media sites, such as www.cbc.ca, www.bbc.co.uk and www.cnn.com.

Evaluating Internet information

Anyone can set up a Web site and offer information. Because of the range of material available on the Internet, from fiction to opinion to fact, it is up to you to evaluate the source of information. As a general rule, you should assess the author's credentials and the quality of the publication or Web site, determine if the material has been reviewed before publication, and consider the comprehensiveness and the tone of the material.

Contacting community agencies

Through your research, you may find the names of associations and community agencies that are available for further information. For example, many community associations have their own Web sites, often with specific contact information. Keep a record of those that you feel would be of most interest to you. Make contact by phone, e-mail or letter to find out more about their services and how they could help you with your search. Always be sure to describe your project and offer to provide them with your findings. This type of communication encourages dialogue and makes it easier for you to return to the association with further requests. Consider writing a brief script of what you want to say and keeping it by the phone as you speak. Keep a pen handy to jot down the person's answers.

Tracking your research

There are different ways to organize and store research, so choose the method that works best for you. Some effective storage methods include:

- keeping all news articles, phone numbers and accumulated research in a labelled legal-size file folder or large envelope
- using an expanding file that is divided into sections to separate data by subject
- storing information in a three-ring binder by taping or gluing articles to hole-punched paper, or using clear plastic sleeves to hold information
- recording your findings onto audiocassette.

You may also consider using some of the following tips to keep organized.

- Make a list of contact names and phone numbers, and staple it to the front of your folder or envelope.
- Record the date, time and place for each piece of research you collect, including notes taken while you are on the telephone. Write this information directly onto articles.
- Record your own ideas, thoughts and feelings about the information you find as you go along.
- Create a chart to track key information.

Topic	Contacts	Date	Notes

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Sharing information

Decide what your goal is for sharing your research. Do you want to create awareness? Do you want to start a dialogue? Do you want to prompt some specific action as a result of your findings? Once you determine your goal, write down the steps you have to take to reach it. Whom you share your information with, and in what context, will depend on the purpose you have.

Your child's school is often a good starting point for sharing research. Ask your child's teacher for a few minutes of his or her time. Bring in a copy of your report, discuss your findings and leave material behind for his or her consideration. Does your school have a newsletter? Most newsletter editors are actively looking for articles to include and might be interested in the findings of your research. School councils may also be receptive to your information.

If you would like to reach a larger audience, explore options in the community. Approach the community association you found to be most directly connected to your research and offer your findings to them. They may publish your report in their newsletter and/or ask you to speak at one of their association meetings.

If you are content with the findings and have no need to publicize your report, write it as a letter to your child and save it in a scrapbook. In future years, your child will value this symbol of the work you did guiding, mentoring and encouraging his or her gifts and talents.

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Looking Back

FINAL WORDS OF PARENTS WHO HAVE MADE THE JOURNEY

Words for the journey

Parents often say that they have learned the most, and felt the most understood, when they talk with other parents. In this last section of the handbook, we offer words and wishes from parents who have been on the journey; these parents know the joys, challenges and adventures of raising children who are gifted. We invited a number of parents to tell us what advice and insights they would like to pass on to other parents. This is what they told us.

Discover, play and take care

Your child does not need to be, and in fact should not be, sheltered from all of life's painful moments. Help her to discover her own solutions to life's challenges. Sometimes a diary or journal can help her sort things out for herself. If she is too young to write, you can act as an impartial scribe in helping her to find her voice.

Play together! Find an activity that is fun for both of you and do it regularly. Those fun memories and a loving relationship will be especially important when your child becomes a teenager.

In the same way that you must put on your oxygen mask first on an airplane, you absolutely must take care of yourself too—as impossible as it may seem at times, make it a priority to eat properly, exercise, get enough sleep and regularly have some time alone to nourish your own spirit.
– Mother of 14-year old gifted daughter

Let them learn how to learn

Children who learn quickly may not really get a chance to learn *how* to learn. They may not get to practise the full learning process: fail, try again, improve, succeed. For our child, team sports provided a safe and satisfying place to discover this with friends. He learned that even when he isn't as good at something as he would like, he can improve and create his own success. Now he carries that belief with him wherever he goes. He is a learner for life.
– Mother of a happily-accelerated junior high student

Keep motivation alive

Welcome your high-schooler's determination to secure a part-time job. Academics may be 'job 1' for your gifted child, but the minimum-wage work world of teenagers provides a reality check along with camaraderie, adult responsibilities, real earnings, practice in money management and the opportunity to develop a good work ethic. Even more importantly, gifted teens who have cruised through the school system learn the time management skills needed to survive that difficult first year of university.

Do not panic if the child who you know is capable of much more, settles for 'good enough' marks. Do make sure they understand which marks are important and when they need to pay attention to

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them. Sometimes marks are just marks: do fifty multiple-choice questions really reflect what has been learned over the year? Focus on the 'gatekeeper' marks that allow for later choices to be made in individual courses, programs of study, or choice of schools. Keeping interest and motivation alive is more important than obsessing about marks. Your child will astonish you with their rate of learning when their heart is in it, and for gifted students that may not happen until post-secondary education.

Be clear when negotiating educational solutions whether your efforts are on behalf of your gifted child or for all gifted children. Be realistic and choose what is best for your child and your family, even if it means switching teachers, schools or districts—your child only moves through the system once. Work with other parents for structural change in the education system for gifted students: but understand it will be for your children's children, your grandchildren.
– Parent of two gifted children, in high school and university

Enjoy and support

As a mother of three gifted daughters, I believe it is extremely important to raise them to be proud of their abilities and to help them understand their giftedness. Gifted girls often either dumb down or become manipulative and cynical if not recognized. Having them identified and placed in a gifted program was crucial to their development. They met a group of students who liked being smart and ambitious. They grew to respect other minds while being respected for their own and as they discovered that their minds worked differently became more tolerant, less threatened by others' opinions.

The challenge for mothers of gifted girls is to enjoy and support their confidence. They will attempt things some of us never dreamed of trying, and why shouldn't they? Watch, listen and carefully counsel when asked; then let them fly.

Life is intense with gifted girls. They react to an arch of an eyebrow so it is important to be open and honest every time they question us. Often their observations exasperate me especially when I am busy but somehow they hone in on the very question I need to ask myself if I expect to achieve my own dreams. If I listen to them, they listen to me!
– Parent of three gifted daughters

Be a cheerleader

I think one of the most important things a parent can do for his or her gifted child is to value their uniqueness. They need support and love to reinforce their special spark. Throughout their school years they will suffer because they are different, and if you can help them survive and come out the other end with their self-esteem intact, they will be well on their way to a fulfilling and happy adulthood. Be their advocate and cheering section.
– Parent of two gifted, and unique, sons

Remember they are children

It has been difficult at times to remember the chronological age of my gifted child. Intellectually, he understood math way beyond grade level, tinkered with genetics for relaxation and debated with adults for sheer entertainment. Then how could I explain the tantrum, anger or tears when things did not work out? He may have understood the world intellectually, but he reacted with a child's emotion. By listening and encouraging him as he processed these intense emotional difficulties, I supported his transformation into a fine young man. Above all, I would urge all parents to respect their gifted child's passion but always remember they are children first!
– Mother of a 15-year-old joyful burden

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Appendices

A. *School Act* Reference Sections
B. Basic Learning Policies
C. Alberta Learning Resources
D. Sample Web Sites for Parents
E. Sample Organizations for Parents

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School Act Reference Sections

Parents may wish to consult relevant sections of the *School Act* pertaining to students with special needs. The *School Act* is available for purchase from Queen's Printer Bookstores in Edmonton (780–427–4952) and Calgary (403–297–6251) or online at www.qp.gov.ab.ca. The *Act* can also be downloaded at no charge at www.qp.gov.ab.ca/documents/acts/S03.cfm.

Interpretation

Section 1(1)(m)	Defines "independent student"
Section 1(2)	Defines "parent"
Section 1(3)	Defines entitlements of an independent student

Part 1–Students

Section 8	Right of access to education
Section 12	Students
Section 13	Compulsory education
Section 14	Enforcing school attendance
Section 15	Attendance at school

Part 2–Schools

Division 1:	Schools Operated by a Board
Section 23	Student records

Part 3–School Boards

Division 1: Provision of Educational and Associated Services

Section 44	Resident student
Section 45	Responsibility to students
Section 47	Special education program
Section 48	Special Needs Tribunal
Section 49	Tuition fees
Section 51	Transportation
Section 52	Transport by parent

Division 2: Operation and Management

Section 59	Powers of separate school boards
Section 60	Powers of boards
Section 70	Open meetings
Section 75	Inspection of documents
Section 78	Accountability of board

Part 5–Appeals

Division 1: Appeals Concerning Student Matters

Section 123	Appeal to board
Section 124	Review by the Minister
Section 125	Powers on review

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Basic Learning Policies

For more information on Basic Learning policies, see the *K–12 Learning System Policy, Regulations and Forms Manual*. Your local school jurisdiction office should have a copy of the manual. Copies of the policies are available on the Web site at www.learning.gov.ab.ca/educationguide/pol-plan/polregs/toc.asp.

Policy No.

1.6.1 Educational Placement of Students with Special Needs
1.6.2 Special Education
1.8.1 Services for Students and Children
3.5.1 Review by the Minister
3.5.2 Special Needs Tribunal

Guide to Education: ECS to Grade 12 (updated annually)
Available at www.learning.gov.ab.ca/educationguide/guide.asp?id=0101.

Funding Manual for School Authorities (updated annually)
Available at www.learning.gov.ab.ca/funding/fundingmanual.

Special Education Definitions (updated annually)
Available at www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/specialneeds/SpecialEd_def.pdf.

Standards for Special Education (2003)
Available at www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/specialneeds/SpecialEd_stds2003.pdf.

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Alberta Learning Resources

Resources for parents

The Parent Advantage: Helping Children Become More Successful Learners at Home and School, Grades 1–9 (1998)
Order #361501 / $7.55 * / 68 pgs.
This resource was developed jointly by Alberta Learning and the Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta. It was written by two experienced writer–teachers and includes strategies parents can use to help their child improve organizational, reading, writing, spelling, math, test taking and project skills.

The Learning Team: A Handbook for Parents of Children with Special Needs (2003)
Order #511891 / $5.10* / 122 pgs.
This resource includes information for parents on policies, procedures, individualized program plans, transition planning, collaboration and resolving differences.
To find a free PDF version of this resource go to: www.learning.gov.ab.ca/educationguide/spec-ed/partners/.

Curriculum Handbooks for Parents (updated annually)
These handbooks outline learner outcomes in each subject area for each grade level.
To find a free PDF version of this resource go to: www.learning.gov.ab.ca/parents/handbooks.

LearnAlberta.ca
Students, teachers and parents will find multimedia learning resources that directly relate to the Alberta programs of study on this Web site. LearnAlberta.ca is a safe and reliable collection of learning resources for students, teachers and parents, developed by Alberta Learning in consultation with stakeholders.

Resources for students

Make School Work for You (2001)
Order #461426 / Student resource $5.45 * / 112 pgs.
Order #461434 / Teacher Guide $5.90 * / 68 pgs.
Order #470948 / Audio CDs $11.10 *
A collaborative project of the Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta and Alberta Learning, this resource is for junior and senior high students who want to be more successful learners. It includes information and strategies to help students know about themselves, get organized, make every class count, get along with others, do well on tests and projects, and stay motivated. The student resource has an accompanying teacher guide and an audio CD set to support students with reading difficulties.

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Programming for Students with Special Needs series

This series was developed for regular classroom and special education teachers to assist them with programming for students with special needs. The information in each book is interrelated and can be used to enhance the teaching and learning of all students.

Book 1 *Teaching for Student Differences* (1995)
Order #292855 / $7.45 * / 151 pgs.
Highlights strategies for differentiating instruction within the regular classroom for students who may have learning or behavioural difficulties, or who may be gifted and talented. It also describes a process for adapting the regular program.

Book 3 *Individualized Program Plans (IPPs)* (1995)
Order #292871 / $6.05 * / 102 pgs.
Describes a process for developing individualized program plans (IPPs) to meet the learning needs of students with special needs. It includes strategies for involving parents, forms and checklists for planning, ideas for transition planning, and case studies and samples of completed IPPs.

Book 6 *Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities* (1996)
Order #315699 / $21.85 * / 355 pgs.
Provides practical strategies for regular classroom and special education teachers. It includes information on identification and program planning, assessment, learning styles, long-range planning and instructional strategies.

Book 7 *Teaching Students who are Gifted and Talented* (2000)
Order #415283 / $20.70 * / 356 pgs.
Addresses administration of programs for the gifted and talented at both the district and school levels, and discusses various conceptions of giftedness. It also discusses identification of students, developing individualized program plans and working with parents.

Book 8 *Teaching Students with Emotional Disorders and/or Mental Illnesses* (2000)
Order #411653 / $14.55 * / 207 pgs.
Takes a comprehensive look at six emotional disorders and mental illnesses including: eating disorders, anxiety disorders, depression, schizophrenia, oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder. It describes the characteristics, symptoms and risk factors for each disorder or illness. It also includes strategies for teachers, parents and other caregivers to use to assist students.

Book 9 *Teaching Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders* (2003)

Order #517378 / $14.00* / 230 pgs.
Provides basic knowledge about this spectrum of disabilities, educational programming implications and programming strategies.
To find a free PDF version of this resource go to: www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/specialneeds/autism.asp.

Other teaching resources

Unlocking Potential: Key Components of Programming for Students with Learning Disabilities (2003)
Order #510851 / $9.60 * / 124 pgs.
Includes sample strategies, suggested outcomes and connections to other Alberta Learning resources for each of the following nine programming components: collaboration, meaningful parent involvement, identification and assessment, ongoing assessment, individualized program plans, transition planning, self-advocacy, accommodations and instructions.
To find a free PDF version of this resource go to: www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/specialneeds/unlock.asp.

Ordering information

Learning Resources Centre (LRC)
Customer Service and Marketing
12360 – 142 Street NW
Edmonton, AB T5L 4X9
Telephone: 780–427–2767
Or toll-free in Alberta by dialing 310–0000
Fax: 780–422–9750
Online ordering: www.lrc.learning.gov.ab.ca/

***Please Note:** All prices subject to change.

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Sample Web Sites for Parents

Alberta Associations for Bright Children (AABC)
www.edmc.net/aabc

College of William and Mary, Center for Gifted Education
www.cfge.wm.edu

Edmonton Catholic Schools
www.lss.ecsd.net/gifted

Eric Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education
www.ericec.org/digests/prodfly.html

GT World
www.gtworld.org

Gifted Canada
www3.bc.sympatico.ca/giftedcanada

Gifted Development Center
www.gifteddevelopment.com

Gifted Education in Alberta
www.educ.ucalgary.ca/altagift

Hoagies' Gifted Education Page
www.hoagiesgifted.org

The National Foundation for Gifted and Creative Children
www.nfgcc.org

The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented
www.ucc.uconn.edu/~wwwgt/nrcgt.html

Parents' Resources
www.ri.net/gifted_talented/parents.html

TAG: Families of the Talented and Gifted
www.tagfam.org

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Sample Organizations for Parents

Alberta Associations for Bright Children (AABC)

Room 1280, 6240 – 113 Street
Edmonton, AB T6H 3L2

Telephone: 780–422–0362
Toll free in Alberta: 310–0000, ask for 422–0362
Fax: 780–413–1631
E-mail: aabc@edmc.net
Web site: www.edmc.net/aabc

The Alberta Associations for Bright Children is a nonprofit charitable organization that welcomes as a member anyone interested in the education and support of bright, gifted and talented children.

As well as the provincial organization in Edmonton, there are two local chapters, one in Edmonton and one in Calgary. There are also a number of network groups located in Drumheller, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer and St. Albert.

The mission of AABC is to advance education by informing, advocating and supporting the social and emotional development, legal rights and general well-being of bright, gifted and talented children in Alberta. This will be accomplished in collaboration with our partners in the educational community. To do this is to benefit education in Alberta generally, as the parts make up the whole.

The Bright Site

Room 1280, 6240 – 113 Street
Edmonton, AB T6H 3L2

Telephone: 780–422–0362
Toll free in Alberta: 310–0000, ask for 422–0362
Fax: 780–413–1631
E-mail: aabc@edmc.net
Web site: www.edmc.net/aabc

The Bright Site is a resource room operated by AABC. The resource materials at the Bright Site include books, videos, audiotapes and journals relating to giftedness. AABC maintains a library of reprints of journal articles covering a wide range of topics. Individual reprints may be purchased at the Bright Site in person, by mail or by e-mail.

The Bright Site can provide information on inclusive education, Alberta charter schools for the gifted and noteworthy school programs, such as the Academic Challenge program of the Edmonton Public School Board and the GATE program of the Calgary Board of Education.

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Centre for Gifted Education (University of Calgary)

170 Education Block
University of Calgary
2500 University Drive NW
Calgary, AB T2N 1N4

Telephone: 403–220–7799
Fax: 403–210–2068
E-mail: gifteduc@ucalgary.ca
Web site: www.ucalgary.ca/~gifteduc/

The Centre for Gifted Education is an interdisciplinary agency housed within the Faculty of Education at the University of Calgary. The Centre works with university departments and community agencies to develop and deliver graduate programs, curricular materials for teachers and workshops for parents, teachers and administrators. The Centre maintains a library, conducts a summer school program for gifted students, conducts research relating to gifted and talented individuals and serves as liaison for various interest groups in the education of the gifted.

Gifted Education in Alberta – Web site

www.educ.ucalgary.ca/altagift

This site is designed to help parents find out about what's happening for gifted children throughout the province of Alberta.

Gifted and Talented Education Council – The Alberta Teachers' Association

The Alberta Teachers' Association
11010 – 142 Street
Edmonton, AB T5N 2R1

Telephone: 780–447–9400 in Edmonton
Toll-free: 1–800–232–7208
Fax: 780–455–6481
Web site: www.gtecouncil.com/

The Gifted and Talented Education Council (GTEC) of the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) is a specialist council for teachers in ECS to Grade 12 with an interest in the education of gifted and talented children. GTEC is dedicated to the improvement of teaching practices of gifted and talented children in the regular classroom, pullout programs and full-time programs.

GTEC publishes a newsletter featuring council news and ideas for classroom use. Twice a year, GTEC also publishes *AGATE* (Alberta Gifted and Talented Education), a journal of theoretical descriptive and research articles on all aspects of the education of gifted and talented children. Those who are not ATA members may become affiliate members of GTEC by phoning the ATA.

SAGE Conference

Web site: www.gtecouncil.com/

The Society for the Advancement of Gifted Education (SAGE) is an umbrella organization of primary stakeholders in gifted education in Alberta, including AABC, GTEC, Alberta Learning and the Centre for Gifted Education. SAGE hosts an annual conference that alternates between Calgary and Edmonton. For further information about the conference, please contact the Alberta Associations for Bright Children at 780–422–0362 or the Centre for Gifted Education at 403–220–7799.

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